Hotel -

GEORGE MEREDITH

GEORGE MEREDITH

HIS LIFE, GENIUS & TEACHING

FROM THE FRENCH OF
CONSTANTIN PHOTIADÈS
RENDERED INTO ENGLISH
:: BY ARTHUR PRICE ::

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1913

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Visit to Flint Cottage (22nd September, 1908)	1
II.	George Meredith's Life	25
III.	George Meredith's Genius	70
IV.	George Meredith's Art	164
V.	George Meredith's Teaching	199
	Conclusion	249

GEORGE MEREDITH

CHAPTER I

A VISIT TO FLINT COTTAGE

(22ND SEPTEMBER, 1908)

ON arriving at George Meredith's home, at Box Hill, near Dorking, one showery afternoon at the end of September, I found a pretty country house, quite different from the luxurious retreats inhabited by those fashionable French writers who are well assured of their fame. Many wealthy tradesmen possess villas far more pretentious on the outskirts of Paris or of London. But the charm of Flint Cottage lies in its absolute simplicity. The little house, where Meredith had lived for forty years, is situated half-way up a slope which inclines slowly towards a wood of firs ; a little garden, admirably kept, surrounds it. When I entered the garden, the convolvuluses were more than half-closed and the first drops of rain fell noiselessly upon the grassy slopes of the hill-side. It was autumn ; and the day

was calm and fresh. A light breeze just swayed the leaves of the lime trees and the elms, which had begun to turn colour. The blackberries were already ripe upon the brambles ; and from the laurel hedges exhaled a bitter odour.

I am received by a lady, who is a trained nurse and also Meredith's housekeeper. While I am taking off my overcoat, on my right hand, through the open door of a narrow room or study I catch sight of the poet.

A dark-coloured rug is wrapped about his knees, as he sits in an invalid's chair facing a photographic reproduction of Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love.* Over the mantelpiece is the framed picture of his wife, and there are other pictures in colour on the walls. Some books and periodicals litter a low table on the left-hand side of his chair ; and on the right is a fire-place. Through the window and the haze beyond one can see, at the bottom of the garden, the branches of a beech intertwined with ivy and the little lawn and garden between the house and the road.

Meredith's head, as outlined in this unreal light, stands out with vigour, even with severity, against the grey depth beyond. His abundant silvery hair curls around his noble and ruddy countenance. His snow-white beard and moustache do not conceal a rather large and very mobile mouth. His nostrils

indicate both delicacy and pride; his eyes retain their eloquent expression, despite the film which sometimes veils their depths. To my mind Sargent has caught their expression better than Watts.[1] A loose, light homespun jacket amplifies his figure. His hands display a movement, an energy, and a vigour truly surprising in an old man who is partly paralysed. The nervous and quick gestures which accompany his speech, denote a temperament certainly passionate if not irritable. Decay is not apparent in this splendid old man of eighty; and, so far from yielding to physical decadence, he struggles to deny it. Thus, though attacked by ataxy, Meredith complains that he is no longer allowed to go out, as formerly, and ramble across the fields. He tells me that he is a great smoker; but in my presence he does not even smoke a cigarette. His memory betrays him only on one occasion, when he gropes for the name of Gobineau. He attracts and compels attention by the energy of his utterances and by the variety of his reminiscences. From the first words of welcome which I receive, I notice that he speaks both clearly and distinctly, and that he articulates each syllable with a precision very remarkable in an Englishman. Certainly, apart from his sad affliction, he would appear to be the embodiment of health.

[1] Cf. the portrait at the commencement of the "edition de luxe" of *The Complete Works*, published by Constable and Co.

" Even the broken pieces of Alexander's empire were magnificent," said Pierre Beyle ; and Meredith, broken by age, seemed to me more alert than most of our young writers.

But few strangers visit the house of the poet ; for, as he produced his masterpieces in solitude, and without other encouragement than that which he received from a limited circle of friends, he now shrinks from his new admirers. Failing health and increasing deafness make him shun the unfamiliar faces of men who cannot now see him as he was in his prime, an active and untiring walker, a brilliant and dazzling conversationalist, a man full of fire, vigorous in body and mind. He distrusts clamorous enthusiasm. He subjects each request for an interview to a severe examination ; and, for his request to be accorded, the visitor must either be a person who interests him or must come, as I did, in the guise of a messenger from France.

If Meredith has grown somewhat reserved, it is not because of his " amour-propre " and the whims which accompany old age ; it is rather his aversion to the interview, by which quite recently he has been badly treated. For example, his opinion upon marriage, wrongly understood and wrongly reported, has shocked the whole Anglo-Saxon race. He also defends himself against interviewers, under the pretext that the interview did not exist in his day, when he himself was a journalist. A publicist

despite himself, he has kept a very painful memory of his forced labour in journalism.

His *bête noire* is the reporter. " Demand nothing original from my modern compatriots ! To-day they choose their models from beyond the sea, and for preference copy the French and the Americans. France, naturally, purifies their taste. But America, that cradled Hercules, infects us with the too free manners of her cowboys and rough riders. These trappers communicate to us their eccentricity ; that mania for besieging persons of note to expose their innermost secrets. Such effrontery stupefies us ; we are too apt to take this unceremoniousness for strength. And, now, behold, the English journals are enviously imitating the most insolent habits of their Transatlantic brethren ! "

" With regard to journalists, men who are as influential as they are susceptible, a young author has a choice of two courses ; either to have nothing to do with them, or to make use of them. For my own part, they make my flesh creep : I have never been able to tolerate them. Robert Browning certainly did not neglect them in his old age. Dickens and Thackeray petted them as a horseman pets his mount before putting it at an obstacle. As for Lord Tennyson, he was a past-master in the art of provoking panegyrics and dithyrambs."

" Here you have a real business man ! He has made literature pay ; he has even made a fortune

out of it. Like an ingenious husbandman he has changed the barren field into a gold mine. 'He bleeds me!' groaned his publisher piteously, but paid him all the same. It was useless for publishers to deprecate Tennyson's so-called eagerness for gain. They yielded to his demands, and the world would have its beloved poet at any price. But then, you see, my countrymen take pleasure in these interesting little elegies; in these edifying apologues; these psychic crises of young clergymen silently tormented by doubt. If they do delight in these peaceful struggles, these silent conflicts, it is because they themselves can be interested without any risk of danger to their faith, to which the young cleric, after many vicissitudes, fails not to conform. Of course, such emotions have their peculiar charm. *In Memoriam* was a triumphant success. A matter of taste, after all! But you Frenchmen do not admire make-believes—above all, make-believe champagne!

"However, let us be just! Lord Tennyson, whom I admire, has the enviable distinction and the lucky privilege of having made our ugly monosyllabic language sing. An English musician is really a kind of blue-bird. Is it not truly awful to compose with words of one foot, and with a vocabulary which limps and then leaps? We pipe upon a bad flute which is shrill and discordant. Shakespeare has played upon it with wonderful skill, Milton with more facility. However, to come to our

day, Tennyson and Swinburne have wrung out of this wretched instrument melodies, stately, impassioned and well sustained.

" It is the custom to be enraptured by the verbal flights of imagination of my old friend Swinburne. Good ! But there is another hidden splendour, and one which ought to be revealed to the public ; it is his daring flow of language. What a torrent of boiling lava ! Do you like the translation of *Omar Khayyám*, by FitzGerald? Yes ? That is good ! The plastic seductiveness of that work fully justifies its immense success. I relish to the full the rhymes of FitzGerald and his beautifully plaintive harmonies, withal so mysterious ; but how can one approve of his pessimism ? *Omar Khayyám* is the vogue to-day, and I know it only too well ; but it is necessary to have food more nourishing, more invigorating for the children of earth ! However, let that pass ! In 1859 I was with some friends at Copsham Cottage, near Esher ; and on a certain afternoon, in full view of all, came Swinburne brandishing a pamphlet which resembled in the distance a Pietistic or Methodist tract. He looked like an ecstatic visionary. Perhaps we should have feared a religious invocation from him, had we not been well aware of his religious beliefs. When Swinburne came near, he began to recite in a high-pitched voice the beginning of that splendid paraphrase which he had just discovered. His enthusiasm infected us ; and

so much so, that the shades of night found us still under the trees, reciting those voluptuous and musical verses. Upon our return, after dinner, Swinburne sought for something upon which to write ; and then, under our eyes, in one attempt, he composed the poem *Laus Veneris*, one of the most perfect in our language."

Meredith is suddenly silent. Does he see again with his mind's eye those far-off years of his, and the young northern dreamers, his comrades, intoxicated with the quatrains of *Omar Khayyám*, with the voluptuousness, the longing and the sadness of the roses of Ispahan and the wine of Shiraz ? Perhaps. . . .

All this time, at our feet, a black "Aberdeen" has been playing with a ball ; and Meredith, watching it, with kindly irony mutters between his teeth :

"Funny old dog ! Funny old dog ! That animal plays in this way the whole day long. And Miss Nicholls here (with a slight bow in her direction) is devoted to him. In the depth of winter, during frosty nights, if the dog desires to go out, she jumps out of bed, leads him as far as the door, and waits patiently upon the doorstep of the cottage for his return. An attractive occupation, is it not ? "

This reminds me of another small dog, the hero of a roguish chapter, delicate and delightful, in *One of our Conquerors*. I speak of it to Meredith,

who thanks me for this reminder. Thereupon he jokingly compliments me upon having attacked his most difficult book; and indeed *One of our Conquerors* does belong to the category of "difficult works." Meredith invites me to look upon it as a kind of literary vengeance.

"I have observed," says he, "since my earlier works, that nothing bewilders the critic so much as that which, avoiding banality, demands a surfeit of attention. When I was about sixty, and I had inherited a small sum of money which made me independent, it pleased me to put before these critics a strong dose of the most indigestible material. I presented to them slyly, *Diana of the Crossways* and the novels which followed. But nothing enraged them so much as *One of our Conquerors*. These poor fellows knew not by what saint to swear. How could they give an account of the cursed volume? It was necessary to commence by understanding it, and they groped blindly in their own great darkness."

Meredith laughs heartily. "Have you read," continues he, "the book that Mr. X has published upon my poems? It is a work denoting great perspicacity, and marks out the author as one possessing originality. But I am astonished that Mr. X has separated my poetry from my prose. My thought unites itself spontaneously to prose and poetry, even as my flesh to my brain and my soul. Ah, well! Here we have a man, very intelligent,

well informed, a good writer belonging to the most refined society of men, among whom I have charming and firm friends. But every critic has his unconscious defect. Mr. X, himself, having determined to find more of the poet in me than the novelist, extricates himself entirely from the difficulties of my prose. But there ! Critics make sport of authors. They behave despotically to us, as do sultans and czars ; yet each of them is at best but the slave placed near the conqueror in order to remind him of his mortal condition. The object of their delight they exalt to the skies. Here and there they find fault with a weak rhyme, a defective image ; then they organise the distribution of their favours, enumerate the masterpieces, classify them, and comment upon them. The rest is cast upon one side, and all is ended. Do not implore their clemency ! These magistrates constitute a tribunal from which there is no appeal ; they give a judgment which is expeditious and summary."

" The press has often treated me as a clown or a harlequin—yes, really ! And with such little respect that my fellow-citizens can scarcely put up with me. Do not cry out ! Certainly, at this late hour they accord me a little glory ; my name is celebrated, but no one reads my books. As for Englishmen, I put them to flight because I bore them. With regard to foreigners, I am but an illustrious unknown. Think ! all my poems were, until 1896, published at my own

expense ! Really, it is so ! No one has bought my books—my novels or my poems. And now, book-collectors snatch up my first editions, which are sold for twenty or twenty-five guineas. Formerly they would have wished me silent. I was exceedingly poor, and I needed, even as a negro does, to earn my bread. What articles, what patched-up criticisms have I written for magazines and provincial journals ! At last, much later, the inheritance of which I have spoken to you, allowed me to live in my own way ; very modestly as you see, in this peaceful cottage. If I continue to write, despite the prevailing indifference to my work, it is because certain magazines, notably *Scribner's Magazine* in America, pay me liberally for my contributions. My contemporaries here know nothing of it. Lately I gave a poem to the *Oxford and Cambridge Review*——" "*The Call*," [1] I interrupted. " What ! you have read it ? You are the first person who has spoken of it to me. I hoped that my poetic warning would be of use to my country. Ah, well ! It has passed unnoticed. No, my countrymen do not value me, believe me ; at the most they will appreciate me after my death.

" Sometimes, by my fireside, I close my eyelids, and then whole chapters of new unwritten novels thread their way before me. But for whom should I write them ? To what purpose ? Is it not enough

[1] *The Call*, September, 1908.

that I am able to produce from time to time a little poetry? I am too old now."

He added, half seriously, half pleasantly: "But they are a kind-hearted people! They have a heart! Their history is truly instructive since the heavy Anglo-Saxon temperament has commenced to ferment, thanks to the Norman leaven. Of themselves, the Anglo-Saxons would have constructed nothing. Excuse my frankness. I am altogether Celtic: Welsh on my father's side, and Irish on my mother's. Neither does the Norman possess the fervid temperament; no generosity, and no spontaneous poetry; but, despite his lack of imagination, he has great keenness, the gift of command, and of statesmanship. Really, the Englishman, his intelligence dulled by his wealth, will not awaken unless a German invasion occurs, or a slaughter upon his northern shores.

"We have no army. The army in India is marvellously equipped and disciplined, but what purpose does it serve as regards England? Besides, India is our weak point. We neglect our own European England. One day, when it has crumbled still further, we shall say adieu to our colonies, to the vast continents of the antipodes, to the archipelago spread abroad upon the equatorial seas. We shall not then have enough of our matchless navy to defend ourselves. And if Germany were to beat us as she has beaten France, should we revive? I

doubt it. France possesses wealth of many kinds ; the wealth of England is strictly commercial. Should anyone extort from us a crushing war-indemnity, we are ruined unless we can re-establish our industries and the power to protect our commerce and our food supplies."

On every occasion Meredith manifests his veneration for France. He has very frequently been there, although it is now twenty years since he last paid her a visit. In former days he had hardly arrived at Paris before he sauntered out on the boulevards in a kind of intoxication. One evening, as he was walking from the St. Lazare station, he met a young girl who was singing aloud as she walked along. She was so pretty that a clerk upon the step of a shop threw her some kisses. She, far from being disconcerted, nodded her head carelessly and indifferently, and passed on her way without ceasing to sing. She sang for herself ; for her own pleasure, because the evening was beautiful and because at heart she was happy. Such charming simplicity cannot be conceived in England. The English have no sense of the natural outpourings of the heart. "No outcome!" declares Meredith, after apologising for this awkward expression.

No less than the landscape does French art delight him. Speaking of the Wallace Collection, the one he likes best in London, he expresses his admiration of the eighteenth century of Watteau, La Tour,

Chardin and Fragonard. But except the school of Constable, few painters equal in his opinion the work of the great French landscape painters of the nineteenth century, among whom Corot is his favourite. This man has looked upon nature more kindly than all others. He has painted her with the dew of the dawn. He has made of a tender birch, rustling near a pool, a veritable masterpiece ; a chaste solitude where the nymphs in chorus blithely come to sing their hymns.

I venture upon the name of Turner. " A strange fellow," replies Meredith pensively. " Imagine a squat, snappish rapscallion, a gnome, who painted the most dazzling landscapes at Chelsea ! Towards the end of each month, having stuffed ten pounds into his trouser pockets, he used to wander to the low quarters of London and mingle with the girls, sailors, and the usual visitors of these slums. His ten pounds being demolished in food and drink among this debauched throng, he would return to his brushes. Genial scatterbrain ! I scarcely like his Venetian fantasies. But he is unsurpassed when he gives us dawns, sunsets, tempests or regattas upon the coasts of the English Channel."

Meredith knew personally the Princes of Orleans, during their exile in England under the reign of Napoleon III.

" These sons of Louis-Philippe, handsome, brave, polished, elegant and well-read, the Duke of

Nemours with his grand air, and the Prince de Joinville so like Francis I with his hanging lower lip, his square-cut beard and his long, almond-shaped eyes, they explain to me better than all memories the charm of ancient France. We had very friendly relationships with them when they lodged at Claremont. But I never felt attracted by the vague and slow intellect of the Comte de Paris. On the day when he spoke to me of making certain reforms when he should be re-established in his hereditary place upon the throne, I mentally hoped that he might never be seated there. France, that impetuous thoroughbred, needs a more gallant cavalier."

Upon entering Meredith's house, I had noticed that he was turning the pages of a recent number of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Our literature interests him not less than our politics; he follows them both. Hence his predilection for the latest works of Anatole France.

"Excellent books which I re-read constantly! Do you not approve of M. Bergeret mingling such irony with his common sense? His reflections upon the Dreyfus affair pleased me by their justness. But this lamentable quarrel has done France a lot of harm. And why, I ask, this bitter rancour? Because the honour of the army had been placed in question? Ah, yes! France foams at the mouth once the honour of her army is questioned. Anatole

France has defended his personal conviction with no less courage than delicacy. If I were younger, I should certainly have written something upon that drama."

Meredith scrutinises me ; then, seeing that I am silent, and that it would be more agreeable to me to return to the question of art and literature, quite abruptly checks himself, and gives me the names of his French visitors. He relates to me his interview with Alphonse Daudet, "a man as brilliant and charming as his books," and he adds :

"I have had the pleasure of receiving Clemenceau ; and I highly esteem this indefatigable fighter. Would not France have found in him a minister fit to lead her ? His conversation captivated me much more than that of a certain Alsatian countess, who was very reactionary, and who was presented to me with a recommendation from the academician Costa de Beauregard. Is he a count or a marquis ? I do not really know. I have always relished his study of Charles Emmanuel of Savoy. One could have written a curious tragi-comedy upon the Court of Turin in the eighteenth century ! "

I wished to recite the romantic attempt of Robert Browning, *King Victor and King Charles,* and to direct the interview towards that great and singular poet, but George Meredith does not give me the opportunity, for he continues :

"Are they always as severe in Paris upon Gobineau? I agree in neglecting his *History of the Persians*, but I beg to draw your attention to his dialogues of the Renaissance. To place the Borgias upon the stage is evidently not a very malicious thing to do; but to evoke the illustrious shades of certain cardinals or humanists, that certainly proves a profound and delicate knowledge of the sixteenth century. Excuse me! I forget that no dialogue is pleasing to Frenchmen unless it is dramatic.

"You see, I continually think about France. If I could again undertake the journey to Paris, I should establish myself in an hotel in the Champs-Elysées. What a joy once more to see the Louvre, and the walks of the Bois de Boulogne.—Is not Paris spoiled by the odour and the uproar of motors and motor-omnibuses? I love the speed of the motor, but how disgusting the dust, the smoke, and the nauseous odours!

"Perhaps I should feel less strange in the south. The twentieth century ought not to have desecrated Nîmes, Arles, Avignon, those magnificent towns now dead, where the Gallic-Roman administration contrasts with the theocracy of the Middle Ages. The 'Félibrige' has all my sympathy. I have studied the Provençal tongue to sufficient purpose to be acquainted with your admirable Mistral. I have even translated into English verse some

stanzas of *Mireille.*[1] Also Aubanel himself is familiar to me. But how much he is dwarfed by a comparison with Mistral! The latter has the abundance and clearness of a spring. I once found myself in the neighbourhood of Maillane, and I could have had access to Mistral through the medium of our common friend Bonaparte-Wyse, had I not feared to impose myself upon him. What a nuisance intruders are! But this fine fellow is certainly able to keep them at a distance. From the portrait that he has sent me (and Meredith pointed to a post-card photograph of Mistral that stood upon the mantelpiece) I divine a poet, beloved of the gods; a hero who has fully known the enjoyment of his own strength."

Meredith deplores that he has dedicated to the glory of France only the selection entitled, *Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History.* In view of my visit he has a copy of the volume by him, and when he offers it to me with an autograph inscription, he asks me if I have read the *Ode to Napoleon.* I reply in the affirmative; but that I was particularly moved by the piece entitled, *France, December,* 1870, published at the time of our defeat,[2] and so pulsating with affection. His reply is suggestive of some slight disappointment:

[1] They will be found at the end of the volume, *An Interpretation of Life.*

[2] See the *Fortnightly Review,* January, 1871.

" Without doubt, it is the most successful and the most perfect; but the other touches me more, because I flatter myself that I have accurately drawn the character of Napoleon, and clearly stated that his genius was in absolute contradiction to the traditional genius of France."

And here he commences to recite the first lines of his *Ode to Napoleon*. His voice, low-pitched, cavernous and vibrating, rises and warms to the measure: enthusiasm transports him; he raises by sudden movements of his foot the plaid which covers his limbs. Then, suddenly the volume falls from his hand, and he says to me:

" I burn to serve France, I assure you! Unhappily, we English are not able to do anything for you because we have lost your confidence. ' Perfidious Albion! ' That is how you designate my country! It is unjust. I sometimes ask myself what was the origin of your distrust. Was it the treacherous and brutal burning of the Danish fleet by Nelson? "

How could I dare to recall to Meredith's mind the outrages of Boscawen, in the reign of Louis XV, the many wars and other incidents?

I have no sweeter memory than this old man so passionately enamoured of France.

" All these questions beset my curiosity," he concludes. " Living alone, I am able to examine them at leisure. I scarcely see more than three of

my old friends, apart from my own folk, namely, my son, and my daughter who actually returns from Paris to-morrow. As to solitude, I have been accustomed to it since my youth ; it is an old friend. And I am interested in so many things that I never feel lonely. Papers and books make up my society. They keep for me those precious and lofty illusions which are dissipated by contact with men. When I have passed the hours in reading, all alone in my arm-chair, I am happy to feel that I am as rich in intellectual desire as a young man of your own age.

" But you, sir, who honour me by presenting my works to the French public, why do you yoke yourself to this barren task ? You appear to me to be imaginative ! Give us then some original work ! And above all, if you speak of my first appearance as an author, pass lightly over my first poems, faults of youth which put me in despair. It is not to my liking that they have reprinted them in the 'edition de luxe' of my collected works. Ah ! how I wish I could destroy them ! "

Meredith has just heard of the death of Sarasate ; and he displays a real sorrow. Formerly he was assiduous in following the concerts given by that enchanting violinist. Nor did he often miss Joachim's recitals, but he considers him a magician less extraordinary than Sarasate. The Spaniard had more passion ; the German more reserve and more style. The playing of both these masters

enchanted Meredith. Alas! he has had to renounce this pleasure for many years. The deafness which troubles him becomes ever worse. Bent towards me (I am seated at his left hand against the table containing books and periodicals) he turns his right ear, which is the more sensitive, and avows his distress.

"It is a phenomenon exceedingly curious and troublesome. I hear all sounds in a false register, in a false key. This makes a series of wrong notes. What a miserable infirmity! I suffer from it most acutely! And it is so humiliating."

Apropos of this deafness; Meredith has never been able to resign himself to his decline. He warned me by letter that he is almost excluded from all conversation, and reduced to soliloquise in the presence of his friends. "Allow me to warn you that I am hard of hearing; it is the price paid for my eighty years." Soon after, in the vestibule, his housekeeper avows to me that even the members of his family are hardly understood by him, the more so in that Meredith does not admit his deafness, as was the case also with Beethoven, to whom they spoke by means of writing. In vain the poet is urged to use an ear-trumpet; his pride will not allow it.

"He is too proud," sighs the good lady, a little vexed.

Who would not retain a painful recollection of such an interview? I expected a serenity bordering

upon ataraxy from a wise man who had read so clearly the book of Earth (*A Reading of Earth*, 1888) and the book of Life (*A Reading of Life*, 1901). How is it possible not to revolt against Meredith himself, when he wilfully lowers his own pride by displaying such supercilious and bitter modesty ?

" To be read or not to be read, troubles not my peace of mind. At eighty years of age, a writer has that which he deserves. My works belong to mankind. I never refuse my permission to translators, for fear that they may have a pressing need for money. And if the French translation of *The Egoist* does not satisfy my friends over the Channel, I sympathise with their complaints without sharing their bitterness."

It is possible that the wise and the saintly Buddhists, by a heroic renunciation, are thus raised to a complete knowledge of things. But in this case, despite these exterior indifferences, one perceives that Meredith suffers continually, deeply, at being so misunderstood by his contemporaries. This, however, results largely from their being shocked by the boldness of his opinions. His housekeeper, for example, this indisputable witness, this constant companion, what must she think of his criticisms of England ? Further, Meredith is not kindly disposed towards official religion. His dislike of Anglicanism prompted him to describe it recently as : " That fable of Christian faith " ! Such a remark perhaps

does not represent the extent of his opinion. A passing irritation sometimes renders him more aggressive than is reasonable. But the cry of his soul is still the same as in 1862, when he published the sonnets *Modern Love*. He seems to repeat constantly : " More brain, O Lord, more brain ! " Alas ! after fifty years of waiting, his prayer is not yet heard.

Never to know if the Master has heard you ; to strain the voice for the most ordinary reply, for the commonplaces of politeness ; to stammer laboriously through with these insipid words ; and then to find it necessary to restrain continually the flood of passionate admiration which seeks, nevertheless, to declare itself ; the visible self-deception of the poet when he does not succeed in penetrating the thought of his interlocutor ; all this ends by creating an intolerable uneasiness. After some hours I experience a choking sensation. That my fatigue does not escape Meredith's notice is most heartrending. His clear eyes regard me with a kind of mocking pity : " You, also," they reproachingly say to me ; " you, like others, give way ; you yield to your weariness ! And this is the result of an interview with George Meredith ! "

As I rise to take leave, Meredith, who moves with extreme difficulty, endeavours to straighten himself in his arm-chair. I beg him to remain seated. He makes a kind of Turkish salute. Placing his right

hand upon his heart, he questions me with a sad smile :

" Shall you come again to Box Hill ? You are not disappointed with your visit ? Really not ? "

More showers of rain in the garden while I stand there, before going down to the station. Under the fitful wind, the ash trees creak feebly, and strange undulations course over the grass. I am alone, listening to this music. There is no one upon the watery roads. Down in the west the sun is dying in magnificence. His long shafts of gold are broken against the window-panes of Flint Cottage. Something divine is abroad in the solitudes. But of the odours that rise from the soft, wet earth, none is so bitter as the perfume of the laurels.

CHAPTER II

GEORGE MEREDITH'S LIFE

WITH the statement that he was born in Hampshire on the 12th of February, 1828, George Meredith turned his back upon questioners. We find none of those anecdotes with which Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Goethe and Victor Hugo supply us so plentifully. He did not recount his memories; he never spoke of his intellectual development, as if, too faithful to his own beliefs, he distrusted the familiar gossip, the accommodating and lengthy accounts where the "ego" is too readily emphasised.

In default of authentic texts, and correct records, the most personal impressions of his youth were wrongly sought for among the chimerical *Adventures of Harry Richmond;* and it was supposed that something of the truth was mingled with the poetry of that romance; that this alone of his works was cast in an autobiographical mould. The frequenters of the literary clubs of London secretly whispered strange stories of the sources of *Evan Harrington.*

Here calumny and curiosity truly played in secret.

The disciples and friends of the poet would have had some difficulty in defending him, since upon this matter he kept strict guard on himself, distrusting even them. If they tried to sound him, either by surprise or by an artifice, they found him impenetrable. Certainly at the time in which he drew near to the end of his days, during the interviews which were turned into soliloquies on account of his ever-increasing deafness, it happened that the old man, passing from one thought to another, would revive some memory of his far-off youth. But he immediately arrested himself, as if the feeble sound of his voice had become unbearable, since he was thinking aloud of the lost period ; and taking refuge once again in silence, he would remain a mystery to the startled questioner.

This is precisely what happened at Flint Cottage on the 31st of March, 1901, when he said to his friend Mr. Edward Clodd : [1]

" How lucky it is that you are here ! Would you be kind enough to fill in the details of this census paper for me ? "

It was, in fact, the evening when the census of 1901 was taken, and there were many questions to answer.

Mr. Edward Clodd began by writing down the details about the servants.

Afterwards, addressing the master of the house, he demanded without any preliminary where the novelist was born. George Meredith replied ungraciously :

[1] Cf. Edward Clodd, "Some Recollections" (*Fortnightly Review*, July, 1909).

" Is that necessary ? "

" Yes."

" Well, put Hampshire."

" Oh, that's too vague ; you'll have the paper returned for more definite answer."

" Well, say near Petersfield. . . ."

It needed therefore unusual circumstances to obtain the half-confessions of George Meredith, and his friends never drew from him more than this, that he was five years old when he lost his mother. Reluctantly he added :

" My mother was of Irish origin, handsome, refined and witty. I think that there must have been some Saxon strain in the ancestry to account for a virility of temperament which corrected the Celtic in me, although the feminine rules in so far as my portraiture of womanhood is faithful. My father, who lived to be seventy-five, was a muddler and a fool. He married again, and emigrated to Cape Town. . . ." [1]

Since George Meredith's death the English journals, and notably some slightly imaginative newspapers from the Cape, have brought to light that mysterious and obscure personage, the father of the illustrious poet. And we have come to know not only Augustus Armstrong Meredith, but a figure much more interesting, much more characteristic, the grandfather, Melchisedec [2] Meredith. The latter, who was

[1] Cf. Edward Clodd, article already mentioned.

[2] Melchisedec ! . . . How is it possible not to think of the famous " Mel," " *Great Mel*," father of Evan Harrington ?

a churchwarden of his parish at Portsmouth, between the years 1801 and 1804, is generally depicted as a dandified and dilettante tailor, who thought himself quite a gentleman; and whose imposing deportment, handsome looks, good fortune, correct speech and aristocratic friendships, exalted his somewhat lowly calling. The portrait is accurate enough, especially if one adds that Melchisedec Meredith was not properly speaking a tailor, but a naval outfitter ; apart from his business connections, he was quite a man of the world, and was generous to prodigality. Melchisedec did not confine himself to supplying the naval officers with clothes and equipment, but he liberally entertained them at his table, and maintained cordial relations with them. There is reference made to this business house in *Peter Simple* by Captain Marryat. Mel's politeness was certainly that of former days, and he was quite a man of fashion.

George Meredith was born above the ancestral shop and baptised on the 9th of April, 1828, in the church of St. Thomas.

The wife of Augustus Armstrong Meredith was Jane Eliza, daughter of Michael Macnamara, of the Point, Portsmouth. In July, 1833, George Meredith's mother died.

As for Augustus Meredith, he consoled himself for his misfortune and financial difficulties by contracting a second marriage. We find him in the

year 1850 at Cape Town, in South Africa, where he kept a well-patronised shop at the corner of St. George's Street and Hout Street. But experience must have made him wiser, since certain of his old customers depict him as a very reserved man, who made little mention of his former life, but was not unwilling to insinuate that in England he used to move in the most exclusive society. Of a healthy complexion and imposing figure, in some respects he resembled his son George, notably in his extraordinary powers of endurance when walking. For example, at the age of sixty-six he climbed Table Mountain without fatigue in the company of a younger man. At last, between 1865 and 1867 he gave up his establishment, retired from business, and returned with his wife to England, where he settled at Southsea.

In his shop at Cape Town he spoke rarely, but always with pride, of his son, the poet-novelist. He used to lend willingly to his intimates *Shagpat* and *Farina*. But on one occasion, in 1860, Mr. B. T. Lawton, of Rondebosch, his customer and personal friend, found him dreadfully dispirited. It was about the time at which the romance, *Evan Harrington*, appeared in serial form in a London periodical. And the circumspect tailor upon that day must have experienced a great need for sympathy, for he could could not help demanding of his visitor if he had read the first chapters of this story.

"Do you know," said he, "that I am pained beyond all expression, because I have reason to think that the story is directed towards me. And, to complete the bitterness, the author is my own son! . . ."

Since that experience, the tailor's friends never borrowed his son's works from him. . . .

These pictures of Augustus Armstrong, and above all of Melchisedec Meredith, may amuse. For our part, if they interest us, it is simply because they sometimes occupied the imagination of the novelist. But let us refrain from exaggerating their influence. If we do not represent George Meredith as one of those lonely children, from whom some terrible family secret is hidden, and who grow up in an atmosphere of oppression, it is because the truth was infinitely more simple—with apologies to lovers of melodrama! . . . Augustus Armstrong Meredith understood nothing about business matters. Even more prodigal than his father Melchisedec, he ended by frittering away his business and had to resign himself to the necessity of leaving Portsmouth, of becoming expatriated, and of seeking his fortune in South Africa.

It is certainly true that the first modern novel by George Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, relates to us the misfortunes of a rich and well-born young man who, in opposition to his father, marries a beautiful maid of humble origin. His second novel,

Evan Harrington, concerns a tailor in whom we may recognise his father. Is it because of these vague reminiscences, rarely mentioned in any of his books, that George Meredith was so reticent about his origin ? . . . Did he fear that he would be rebuked, as was Charles Dickens formerly in creating the inexpressible Micawber, as having placed upon the stage certain of his relations ? . . . Perhaps so, perhaps not ! . . .

.˙.

In any case, it is useless to maintain that Augustus and George Meredith never entered into direct relationship with one another. They communicated by letter, and even used to see one another at intervals. The father did not take any very active part in the education of his son, who was first educated at St. Paul's Church School, Southsea. His mother, upon her death, bequeathed to him a modest inheritance, the administrator of which afterwards placed the little George at a boarding-school. And Meredith, later on, confided this to Mr. Clodd :

Practically left alone in boyhood, I was placed by the trustee of my mother's small property at school, my chief remembrance of which is three dreary services on Sundays, the giving out of the text being the signal to me for inventing tales of the Saint George and Dragon type. I was fond of the *Arabian Nights*, and this doubtless fed an imagination which took shape in *The Shaving of Shagpat*, written, I may tell you, at Weybridge, with

duns at the door. But I learned very little at school, until I was sent to Neuwied. . . .[1]

And thus, even as Harry Richmond, young Meredith journeyed early into Germany. But he remained there much longer, as he resided at the home of the Moravian Brothers at Neuwied near Coblenz for eighteen months. This was a painful apprenticeship. "The German character," said he, "is astonishingly ponderous!" . . . God knows if he distorts Germanic methods in his *Essay upon Comedy!* . . . Nevertheless, he always spoke well of Germany, and has never decried its military, industrial, commercial and maritime development. He confessed to Mr. Clodd :

> The learning of German proved a good thing to me when my friend Borthwick, of the *Morning Post*, sent me as correspondent in 1866 on the outbreak of war between Austria and Italy.[2]

German affairs always interested him greatly. His novel, *The Tragic Comedians*, denotes an accurate knowledge of the political struggle between Bismarck and Ferdinand Lassalle. Nothing is more natural than that Harry Richmond should adore the Princess Ottilia ; this little lady has all the charm of a twin-sister of Gretchen, whom one would have pictured in a little court "à la Stendhal."[3] Besides, to give fuller recognition to the terrible frankness

[1] Cf. Edward Clodd, article mentioned. [2] *Ibid.*
[3] *The Adventures of Harry Richmond.*

of the German University professor Meredith makes Dr. Julius Von Karsteg pass bitter censure on English society.[1] Some German characteristics are ingeniously portrayed in *One of our Conquerors*. All of which is natural enough, for romantic Germany had stamped its impress deeply upon Meredith's imagination.

Further, it is without doubt to the Moravian Brothers of Neuwied, that George Meredith owes that largeness and depth of view which override established religious prejudices. In fact, the little town of Neuwied had become the true temple of tolerance, since Prince Alexander of Neuwied in 1762 had unobtrusively opened it to various monotheistic sects. Catholics, Lutherans, Jews, Calvinists and Moravian Brothers used to mingle in perfect harmony under his government. There prevailed in this spiritual Eldorado a sweetness of manners, a peace, a spirit of liberalism, that George Meredith must have often regretted when resident in his own land.

. . .

England, at heart impervious and secretive, disconcerts even the English; when they return home after a long absence. Many despair of becoming acclimatised and go away to settle in France, Switzerland, or Italy. For example, Robert Browning could only with difficulty endure the climate

[1] *The Adventures of Harry Richmond.*

and the systems of England; an overpowering nostalgia drew him periodically to the sun-bathed hills of Tuscany, to the orchards and vineyards of Umbria. This sense of unrest must have tormented to a still greater degree the sensitive youth whom foreign hands had already moulded. The customs and indigenous institutions jarred strangely on him even at the age of fifteen.

It is not that he would not share that love of fresh air with his comrades, that love of long walking excursions, of games, and of violent exercise where a superabundant energy is speedily consumed; but, superior to the pleasures of his age, he was morally separated from his vigorous and thoughtless schoolfellows. Generally speaking, the English are not precocious. To display their vigour, and their athletic prowess, is above all other things their chief aim. Their desire to think only becomes stimulated in later life. Besides, young Meredith brought into his country a mind nourished with substantial German food, and a desire for glory that success in sport could not assuage.

In 1845 he was articled to a lawyer, but he turned to journalism. George Meredith's income was small indeed, and in lack of money he resembled Evan Harrington;[1] whilst in ambition he may be likened to Captain Beauchamp.[2] Let us hear him further:

[1] Cf. *Evan Harrington.*
[2] Cf. *Beauchamp's Career.*

When I came back from Germany, I found that the trustee had mismanaged my little estate, but enough was left to article me to a London lawyer. He had neither business nor morals, and I had no stomach for the law, so I drifted into journalism, my first venture being in the shape of a leader on Lord John Manners, which I sent to the *Standard*. Very little came of that, but I got work on one of your Suffolk papers, *The Ipswich Journal*, which kept me going. . . . Some ghoul has threatened to make search for these articles; may the Commination Service be thundered in his ears. . . .[1]

He employed his leisure hours in devouring the poets, both ancient and modern. All were read, from ancient Homer down to the elegiac poets of the Lake School. Already captivated by the dramatists contemporary with Shakespeare, he did not neglect those authors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who wished to inaugurate a school of English comedy: Ben Jonson, Dryden, Wycherley, Congreve and Sheridan—whose granddaughter served, according to many, as the prototype of *Diana of the Crossways*—and, as he spoke both French and German, his interests were of wide extent. According to his whim, he passed easily from Carlyle to St. Simon. . . . So many questions, at once stirring and varied, cannot be assimilated all at once; but they stimulate a personality which is trying to find itself.

Let us not pay too much attention to Meredith's

[1] Edward Clodd, article mentioned.

first attempts. His poem *Chillianwallah*, published on the 7th of July, 1849, by *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, is only a mild patriotic complaint, very similar to many others. It commemorates with candour the battle of the 15th of January, 1849, in which the Sikhs killed and wounded about two thousand four hundred officers and men under General Gough. The Punjaub, at that time, yielded no more success to men of letters than to soldiers. It has remained to Mr. Rudyard Kipling to give due glory to colonial warfare.

. . .

Meredith very wisely leaves Cabul and Nepal to Lord Dalhousie, Governor-General of British India, and sings his idylls under the aspens and beeches of Hampshire and Surrey.

It is the time of his first marriage, when he is hardly twenty-one years old. He marries the widow of Lieutenant Nicholls ; he had made her acquaintance through her brother Edward, the son of Thomas Love Peacock. And Mary Ellen, twelve years later, died estranged from the poet.

One day, referring to this period, George Meredith expressed himself thus to Mr. Clodd :

> No sun warmed my roof-tree ; the marriage was a blunder ; she was nine years my senior. . . .

An irreparable calamity separated them for ever. And George Meredith lived alone with his child ;

that little Arthur of whom he was so proud and who was to die at the age of thirty-seven.

The details of this married life are too little known to allow us to comment upon them. It is sufficient for us to know that George Meredith's first wife was extremely clever, lively, cultivated and attractive, and that the poet never spoke of her but with respect and admiration. A person, in a very good position to know the truth, told us one day : " The married couple resembled each other too much to live in harmony." This is, without doubt, the most just explanation.

George Meredith did not consider the question of a divorce, but imposed upon himself some confessions, some examinations of conscience, whose true beauty lies contained in the fifty sonnets of *Modern Love:* and he completed that cycle after 1861, that is to say after the death of his wife.

Thus was a deplorable misunderstanding transfigured. Meredith came out of this ordeal matured, purified by grief, with a fund of indulgence and pity towards women whom he considered defenceless victims, perfidiously exposed by their education, to their own caprices and to our vilest desires. . . .

His first attachment gave him the advantage of the intellectual patronage of his father-in-law. Thomas Love Peacock, although his name was but little known in France, enjoyed, nevertheless, a real renown. An essayist and a novelist of merit, he

belonged to the singular and brilliant coterie, prior to the Victorian era, which numbered among its members, Coleridge and Thomas de Quincey. His influence upon Meredith became all the greater when they saw each other almost daily, the young writer and his wife having settled in Surrey, at Lower Halliford, adjoining Shepperton, where his father-in-law resided. It has even been suggested that Dr. Middleton in *The Egoist* bore resemblance to one of Peacock's characters—the Dr. Foliott of *Crotchet Castle.* There may be this analogy, but this is certain, that George Meredith, in May, 1851, dedicated his first verses : " To Thomas Love Peacock, Esq., with the profound admiration and affectionate respect of his son-in-law."

All dawns are not glorious, and no one would be well advised to compare Meredith's first attempts with those of Lord Byron, of Keats, of Shelley, or even of Swinburne. It is quite sufficient that the best judges of that time have listened without fatigue to his artless songs. Tennyson declared that he could never forget the stanzas of *Love in the Valley.* That eclogue, imperfect at that time and unnoticed amongst the other pastorals which were weak and rather colourless, had already touched and delighted some readers, many years before it haunted Robert Louis Stevenson and " intoxicated him like wine." The other bucolics, sylvan or pastoral, were equally pleasing to William Michael Rossetti, who received

them with kindliness.[1] As for Charles Kingsley, he submitted the little volume to a very just examination, in which eulogy is associated with some very fair criticism.[2] He points out the weakness of the rhythm, and the descriptions as surcharged with realistic detail. On the other hand, Kingsley commends the richness and uniqueness of inspiration, "the lively seeds of poetry, certain to germinate and grow"; and then the atmosphere so poetic and pure, and so transparent, "that the sweetness of the primordial conception is therein revealed even through the dissonance." . . . As a matter of fact, these languorous verses but faintly foreshadow the definite and almost harsh writer of *The Egoist.*

He himself was by no means elated by his success. He had sacrificed fifty or sixty pounds for the publication of his *Poems.* Is there anything more lucid than the letter written by him in July, 1851, to Charles Ollier, the editor and friend of Lamb, Keats and Shelley? Listen to Meredith judging his own booklet:

> I prepared myself, when I published, to meet with injustice and slight, knowing that the little collection, or rather selection, in my volume, was but the vanguard of a better work to come; and knowing, also, that the strictest criticism could scarcely be more unsparing than myself on the faults that are freely to be found; knowing, lastly, that a fresh volume (of poetry) is with

[1] *Critic*, November 15th, 1851.
[2] *Fraser's Magazine*, December, 1851.

the Press a marked book. . . . The poems are all the work of extreme youth, and, with some exceptions, of labour. They will not live, I think, but they will serve their purpose in making known my name to those who look with encouragement upon such earnest students of nature who are determined to persevere until they obtain the wisdom and inspiration and self-possession of the poet.[1]

. . .

For four years Meredith husbanded his strength instead of wasting his time upon trifles.[2] And the first prose work which he wrote in this retirement became a masterpiece at once. While finishing it at Weybridge, he was troubled by unpleasant visits from his creditors. At last, in the December[3] of 1855, *The Shaving of Shagpat* appeared.

Imagine *The Midsummer Night's Dream* prolonged for a thousand and one nights ! The book is a series of *tours de force ;* Titania herself is transported to the mythical age when the roc hovered above the jasmines of Mosul. The delightful fairy ventures among the barbers, the sultans, the viziers, the odalisques, and among innumerable winged genii, now propitious now wrathful, even to the time when the reformer Shibli Bagarag, a kind of new St. George, has conquered the dragon, Shagpat. . . .

[1] Letter mentioned by Mr. Walter Jerrold, *George Meredith*, pp. 7–8.

[2] We know that during this period only a very small number of poems appeared, published by *The Leader*, *Fraser's Magazine*, and *Household Words*.

[3] The title gives the date as 1856.

A young northerner masquerading as Scheherazade, runs the risk of frittering away his ideas in frivolous arabesques, if he does not bridle his imagination. Repelled by an excess of embellishment, we would place the advantages of a true neo-classic training much above these pretentious devices. Exoticism amuses us only for a moment. In fact, to hold our attention, there must be some reserve even in abandonment, some propriety even in exuberance, a real subject rather than a medley of episodes and adventures; and, above all, that triple simultaneous appeal to the flesh, the mind and the soul, by which Meredith's work has been characterised since the appearance of *Shagpat*.

From the first George Eliot marvelled at such a harmony of qualities. She, who could not imagine a language so radiant, such a profusion of picturesqueness and colour, was dazzled as though she had penetrated into the garden of the Hesperides.

"George Eliot," said Meredith roguishly, "had the heart of Sappho. But the face with its long nose, the protruding teeth as of the Apocalyptic horse, betrayed animality. . . ." [1]

George Eliot's enthusiasm was outpoured in an article in which she acclaims the new work of genius, "precious as an apple tree among the trees of the forest." [2] The comparison did not soften the

[1] Edward Clodd, article mentioned.
[2] *Leader*, 5th of January, 1856.

hearts of book-lovers. And as the apple tree did not produce apples of gold, it was put up for sale by the angry and discomfited publisher. This action did not prevent another firm [1] from printing *Farina* in the following year, 1857. This little Gothic tale suggests a mixture of eau-de-Cologne and Rhine wine. (Abominable mixture for a French reader!) It encountered no better a fate; nor is this to be regretted, as it did not deserve one.

. . .

In a word, despite certain signs of approval which did not escape Meredith's notice, the public refused to thaw. Its coldness with regard to an allegory as dull as *Farina* was justified; towards the *Shaving of Shagpat* the aloofness could be still explained, for everyone is not of the kind to be pleased with an Oriental parable. But indifference can no longer be separated from foolishness, when *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859) met with disdain. Of that piece of adorable fiction, that miracle of ingenuity and of science, James Thomson and R. L. Stevenson could only speak with tearful fervour. It was written with cheerful rapidity in a single year, for the most part at 7 Hobury Street, Chelsea.

Shortly after the publication of *Richard Feverel*, the publishers received a letter from Carlyle, who desired to make the acquaintance of the author. Let the latter speak:

[1] Smith, Elder and Co.

I paid him a visit. He told me that his wife, at first hostile to my *Feverel*, had flung it upon the ground, but soon picked it up again and began to read loudly certain passages. Then Carlyle said: "This man is no fool!" and they persevered with the book to the end. He told me that I had in me the making of a historian. I replied that as so much fiction enters into history, I preferred to confine myself to my novels. . . .

The Press, however, did not receive *Richard Feverel* with favour. Not that the envious had organised "the conspiracy of silence"; but it seemed that contemporaries feared to compromise themselves. . . . The critic of *The Times*, not altogether withholding his sympathy, made some cautious remarks about the conclusion and the philosophical tendency of the work. And why? . . . Because Meredith had aimed a mortal blow at the educational methods of his day. The disastrous system of Sir Austin Feverel was little more than the educational system of the English upper classes carried to logical extremes. "Meddle not with the hatchet!" cried Charles I upon the scaffold. . . . Authors were allowed occasional flights of fancy; but when they begin to have ideas, and particularly subversive ones, they can hardly be tolerated. Not clergymen alone thundered against the disturbing volume, and banished it from their parochial libraries, but even Mudie's library refused point-blank to place it upon sale, that it might not offend the modesty of its patrons.

The ice was not yet broken, and Meredith could not succeed in conciliating the multitude. Therefore, seeing that his novels paid him no better than his poems, he returned to journalism. He ground out articles for the *Ipswich Journal*, the *Standard*, the *Morning Post*, the *Manchester Guardian*. Disheartening work, but then he did not dread having plenty to do, and almost revelled in being at grips with that terrible "question of money" which, more than all other touchstones, is the test of conscience and talent. . . . He saw in himself the struggle of two ideals, one of material, the other of moral well-being, and in *Evan Harrington*, 1861, this antagonism was to end in the triumph of the spirit of sacrifice.

This novel *Once a Week* deigned to print, as being on the whole admirable for its readers. But Meredith still had an irreverent habit of juggling with the various social classes and of mixing them up pell-mell, which scared good folk. The lovers of Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot turned elsewhere, and the author, in order not to perish of hunger, resolved to become reader to an old blind lady, and to confine himself more closely to country life.

He had no cause to regret this step. Sir William Hardman, having visited him at Copsham Cottage, near Esher, in Surrey, was astounded and charmed with his sprightliness, and became his fast friend.

With the sun upon the glades, and the odour of wet, green grass, and sometimes a chat or a walk with two or three intellectual companions, Maurice FitzGerald, Leslie Stephen, or Sir Francis C. Burnand, Meredith wished for no other pleasures. And the solitudes suited him admirably, for it was in a humble country cottage that he wrote and prepared for the Press the sonnets of *Modern Love* (1862).

These new poems seemed likely to rot upon the shelves of the book-shops, when a bilious critic (blessed be his memory!), seeking a dispute with Meredith, brought them to light. Under the pretext that *Modern Love* dealt with conjugal infidelity without suggesting any remedy, he severely reprimanded the poet upon his lack of religious conviction. . . . Fifteen days later, in the same review (*Spectator*, the 7th of June, 1862), Algernon Charles Swinburne replied with a warmth, a passion, a fervour, a brilliant fire of eloquence which makes his counter-attack a model of dialectic. This vindication, the most vehement that ever one great poet had dedicated to another, caused an enormous sensation. Swinburne was already celebrated as much for his gorgeous imagery as for his contempt of moral conventions; his protégé from that time onward excited general interest.

The two writers vowed a friendship which time failed to break. They were to live for fifty years

and to die within a few weeks of each other in the spring of 1909. The publication of *Evan Harrington* by *Once a Week* associated George Meredith with the most notable contributors of the paper: Harriet Martineau, Millais, Swinburne and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The latter, in his pen and ink drawing of *Mary Magdalene at the gate of Simon the Pharisee*, gave to his Christ the likeness of his new friend, and it is one of the earliest portraits that we have of Meredith. Later, when Rossetti had lost his wife, in February, 1862, the Pre-Raphaelite painter-poet and his brother William Michael, with Swinburne and George Meredith, rented Queen's House, Chelsea (16 Cheyne Walk).

Each of the tenants had his particular room for study. The dining-room was used in common. But the delicate poet of *The Blessed Damozel* unfortunately shocked George Meredith by his enormous appetite. It is difficult to imagine Dante Gabriel swallowing five poached eggs for breakfast, having previously placed them upon five slices of bacon! . . . "Yes, I protested against this habit," declared George Meredith in January, 1909; "but it injured the health of my friend more than our friendship." . . . Nevertheless, even upon the confession of their companion William Michael Rossetti, there never existed between these two men that absolute cordiality which suggests and facilitates mutual concessions. In proportion as the differences

were more pronounced, Meredith's visits at Chelsea became more rare and brief. A lasting agreement between artists of volcanic personality would have been a supernatural phenomenon. George Meredith was the first to go, although he hardly slept once at Queen's House, considering it merely a resting-place where it was exceedingly pleasant to spend some hours in company with excellent writers and good fellows during his visits to London. Soon after, it was Swinburne's turn. Thus was broken up a coterie which has remained celebrated in the annals of English literature.

. . .

This separation did not result in a quarrel, as Meredith could give sufficient reasons for absenting himself from the amiable Pre-Raphaelite company. A journey to Rouen and Paris, undertaken in the summer of 1863 with Sir William Hardman, furnished the best pretext. Sir William has recounted their nocturnal rambles in the Champs-Élysées, their fine suppers at the *Trois Frères*, or at Véfour's, and their visit to Versailles. Meredith went on to Grenoble, and from there through Chamounix into Switzerland.

It was not, however, these wanderings which resulted in the meeting with his second wife, and the twenty years of domestic happiness which followed upon their marriage. Miss Marie Vulliamy lived with her parents at Mickleham, in the neighbourhood

of Esher, where George Meredith had for some time resided. She belonged to an old French Huguenot family, which had originally emigrated to Geneva, and then settled in England. She was beautiful, as is shown in the fine portrait by Frederick A. Sandys, painted in 1864. Passionately attached to her husband, active, clear-sighted, and as economical as their means demanded, the second Mrs. Meredith also found time to translate several books, notably the *Life of Cavour*.

The year 1864 was devoted to the elaboration of *Emilia in England*. This sweet and supple narrative did not exceed the framework of an ordinary novel. It tells the history of a young Italian *prima donna*, endowed with a ravishing voice and with the most passionate patriotism. Mr. E. D. Forques undertook a French translation for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, under the title of *Sandra Belloni*.[1] This new title succeeded in definitely supplanting the first. But George Meredith owed nothing else to his insipid translator, for the French version of *Sandra Belloni* flattered the original no more than the similar mutilation of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*.[2]

Meredith became so enamoured of the cause of Italian independence, that he determined upon a completion of *Sandra Belloni*. But, whilst he was judging the Italian reformers according to their

[1] See the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of 15th of November, 1st and 15th of December.

[2] *Ibid.*, 15th of April, 1st and 15th of May, 1865.

deeds, he created *Rhoda Fleming* (1865), the most dramatic of his romances, and that which could, most easily, be adapted to the stage. The fascination of plot and treatment—the story is of a poor girl, abandoned by her lover, who marries a despicable man in order to appease her Puritan family—betrays the influence of Dickens, already noticeable in the humorous interludes of *Richard Feverel* and *Evan Harrington*. But Meredith's fierce pessimism would have appalled Charles Dickens. And the tone, the style, the innumerable metaphysical digressions, social and psychological, of *Rhoda Fleming* show clearly that the difference between the two novelists is immense.

In the meanwhile, in March, 1866, General Govone signed at Berlin a defensive and offensive alliance, the worth of which was made evident at the end of June, when Prussia and Italy simultaneously attacked Austria. The *Morning Post* sent George Meredith into Italy as its war correspondent.[1] It is true that operations were not carried out upon the banks of the Mincio. Archduke Albert upon land, and Admiral Tegethof in the Adriatic, repelled the Italians, and thus Meredith had no opportunity of seeing a pitched battle. He hardly smelt the powder, even if he heard the grape-shot. But he was compensated by his wanderings among the old stones of Venice. During these leisure hours afforded him

[1] Consult the volume of the *Memorial Edition*.

by the revolutionary and warlike times, he studied the provinces of Milan and Bergamo ; he visited the places and the scenes which are so well represented in *Vittoria*, and in the first chapters of *Beauchamp's Career*. And the warm colouring of his pictures he owes, no doubt, to this country, of sunlit seas and distant gulfs of light.

However, the *Fortnightly Review* published in serial form the adventures of *Vittoria* (15th January, 1866, to 1st December, 1866), the definite text of which was only agreed upon in 1867. This epilogue, somewhat detached in treatment, was not equal to *Sandra Belloni ;* nevertheless, it succeeded better, because the actuality of the matter and its picturesque romanticism allured the public. The magazines and the reviews, after this measure of success, no longer refused to accept George Meredith's novels.[1] It was at this time that Mr. John Morley,[2] about to sail for America, entrusted for a while the editorship of the *Fortnightly Review* to his friend George Meredith.

Books of every kind claimed his attention. He even read and annotated manuscripts woefully disfigured by corrections and erasures, for the publishers, Messrs. Chapman and Hall. He faithfully fulfilled for this firm the post of reader. It was in the capacity of " reader " that he had the satisfaction of discovering, of assisting with his advice,

[1] *The Egoist* is the exception. [2] To-day Viscount Morley.

and revealing to England, such writers as Thomas Hardy and George Gissing. He declared to his contemporaries:

> Whenever I give honest praise, I will not stint it, although I remind those who hunger after it that, if they will be drenched with honey, they must expect the wasps. . . .[1]

These literary duties did not thwart a project which had occupied his mind for some time. *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* was offered, in 1871, to lovers of piquant anecdote. Then appeared with an unforgettable prominence, seated upon a horse of bronze, upon which he counterfeited the statue of a margrave, booted and spurred, like a Marlborough or a Prince Eugène, that astounding Richmond Roy, prince of fine talkers, who outrivals the most hardened knave, from Smerdis the Magian down to our "soi-disant" Louis XVII.

The bewilderment and stupefaction had not ceased, when Meredith performed one of his most generous acts. He uttered that great cry of love and pity, the ode entitled *France, December*, 1870, at the time when the greater portion of his fellow-countrymen were glorying in the victories reported by the Germans in Paris. His passionate veneration for the "Mother of Nations" became the prevailing topic in England. He gained a name for eccentricity, but for nothing more.

[1] Edward Clodd, article mentioned

As for France, she had her own wounds to dress, and bestowed no thought upon that funeral wreath. . . . Besides, Meredith returned as soon as possible to his own country. Having passed his fortieth year, he maintained the right, and assumed the task of judging politics. Facts noticed in 1868, when his excellent friend, Admiral Augustus Maxse, offered himself as a Radical candidate for Southampton, gradually suggested *Beauchamp's Career* (1876) to him. This book does not advocate a new Utopia. It is not a public placard notifying some ideal Eldorado in accordance with the prevailing taste of the day. Clearly, concisely, the champion of the Liberal cause teaches us by his own irrational, chivalrous and symbolical death what it costs to fight for the people : he is drowned in endeavouring to save a poor child which has fallen into the river. . . . A corpse upon the bank ; near by a squalling brat, digging its little fists into its eyes ; that is all that remains of Commander Beauchamp ! . . .

Meredith did not shrink from sudden changes. To this sad story succeeded, without any period of transition, the memorable lecture, entitled later, *An Essay upon Comedy.* When he enjoined upon his audience to assimilate the wisdom of the orator, he somewhat scared the company which assembled in large numbers at the " London Institution " on the 1st of February, 1877. But countenances became brighter at the sight of an unlucky

Arab, who had wandered into the hall by mistake.

The spirit of comedy, analysed in so masterly a manner in that lecture, is recognisable, now by itself, now combined with the spirit of tragedy, in three little stories of the same period: *The House on the Beach* (1877), *The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper* (1877) and *The Tale of Chloe* (1879). These sketches predict a more important undertaking, justly proportionate to the greatness of the subject and to the impression it was to produce. Written in five months, with inconceivable speed, this work was *The Egoist* (1879), a comedy in narrative form.

It is not worth while to discuss whether *The Egoist* is Meredith's masterpiece. Opinions differ. They vary so much according to taste that it seems superfluous to make an estimate. Is there not sufficient in Meredith to satisfy all tastes? . . . But what assures a place of honour to *The Egoist* is that there has been expressed by Meredith the meaning and unity of his apparently heterogeneous production, and that it has kindled the enthusiasm of those men of letters least likely to yield to an infatuation. Like the legendary kings, Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar, three magi of Great Britain, James Thomson, William Ernest Henley, Robert Louis Stevenson, saw the wonderful star, and followed it to the chalet at Box Hill. Stevenson, above all,

having read *The Egoist* four times, exclaimed with his customary vivacity: "I am convinced more and more that Meredith is destined to be immortal!" . . .

In fact, after *The Egoist,* Meredith could add nothing to his glory, and it was in giving counsel that he employed his old age. "Ah!" he then exclaimed, "if I had been able to bask in the sunshine of success in my youth, what inspiration I should have received towards better work!" . . . But it was now too late. . . .

The Tragic Comedians bore as sub-heading this title: "A study in a well-known story." Meredith, in 1879, had read a book by Hélène von Racowitza, formerly Hélène von Dönniges, entitled, *My Relations with Ferdinand Lassalle,* and he forthwith improvised a clever variation of this popular German theme. Under the disguise of relating an account of the love and death of the Socialist demagogue, he advanced the theory that a man of genius cannot, without peril, confide in a woman, however intelligent, so long as our system of education tends to weaken the will-power of women.

This theory he dearly cherished. After having given lyric expression to his love of nature in the *Poems of the Joy of Earth* (1883), he once more attacked the problem of the education of women in *Diana of the Crossways* (1885). Curiously enough, this novel furnished Meredith with those great allies

which he had always disdained—the circulating libraries. Their subscribers identified the character of Diana Warwick with Mrs. Norton, Sheridan's own granddaughter. This lady was famous in 1840, for her spirit, her beauty and her much-discussed Platonic relations with the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne. At the time of Robert Peel's adherence to the cause of Free Trade, she was accused of having sold to *The Times* that secret of State, entrusted to her by a friend. . . . Meredith himself contradicted it. But slander refused to be disarmed. Calumny always leaves something behind, and that is the reason why *Diana of the Crossways*, that novel of pure psychology, finds favour in the eyes of the general reader, despite its bewildering preface, its errors of composition and its enormous improbabilities.

Disgusted with the scandal that he had provoked, despite himself, and nevertheless desiring to turn this period of favour to profit in order to put before his countrymen certain essential truths, Meredith published, in quick succession, *Ballads of the Tragic Life* (1887) and *A Reading of Earth* (1888).

He had lost his second wife on the 17th of September, 1885. Although Meredith was always restrained in speaking of his sorrows, a magnificent poem of melancholy, *A Faith on Trial*, reveals to us how bravely he tried to repress his grief through respect for the laws of Nature.

Then, after a long silence, always beset by the

burning question of feminism, he again essayed to fathom it in *One of our Conquerors* (1891), *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894) and *The Amazing Marriage* (1895). In this last novel, in which Meredith regains his lightness of touch, the roguish charms of his youth make strange contrast with the pathetic tone of his old age.

Although the source of romantic inspiration was still brisk and active, he feared that the greater part of the critics, bewildered by his recent boldness, would be unable to conceal to the end their embarrassment and their fatigue. . . . His portfolio closed upon some unfinished manuscripts of earlier date. Among them were *Celt and Saxon*, the novel which the *Fortnightly Review* was the first to offer us, and the unpublished comedy, *The Sentimentalists*.

Unlike those butterflies of literature, always fascinated by the footlights, he did not envy dramatic authors their loud-sounding victories. He did not refuse permission for the tragi-comic misadventures of his immortal *Egoist* to be seen on the stage, but he discouraged those who dreamed of dramatising *Evan Harrington*.

"And the part of Countess de Saldar," he demanded coldly, "to what English actress would you entrust her part?"

If Meredith has little taste for play-writing, even as a relaxation from the novel, it is because he

inclines to the didactic style, making free use of the abundant stores of wisdom and eloquence which he has housed during fifty years. Like Victor Hugo, he publishes his " contemplations."

After *The Empty Purse* (1892), an accusation in verse against the principles of heirship ; after the superb *Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History* (1898), in which the hymn *France, December, 1870*, holds the heart like another *Gloria Victis ;* after *A Reading of Life* (1901), which we believe to be his poetic testament, the patriot, the thinker, the poet, sends us from beyond the tomb as a last message, the sheaf of his *Last Poems* (1909).

. . .

George Meredith, by reason of his love of retirement and solitude, had confined himself for some time to the country. But as his love of nature was neither exclusive nor superstitious, he fled not from mankind.

" Earth was not Earth before her sons appeared." [1] In town, as in the woods, he felt equally near to Nature. As long as his strength would allow, he used to travel from time to time to London. Between the years 1880 and 1890, when the Irish agitation was a burning question, he often sat in the Strangers' Gallery. His mother was of Irish birth. " Often," says Mr. Walter Jerrold,[2] referring to the Parnell Trial, " more than one of the leading advocates in that historic trial was moved for a moment into

[1] *Appreciation* sonnet. [2] *George Meredith*, p. 25.

forgetfulness of the task in which he was engaged by the news that George Meredith was sitting just behind him. . . ."

Not that Meredith delighted in controversial politics; on the contrary, he avoided them. . . . But he never refused the influence of his eloquence to those who were oppressed. Glance at his latest words! What are they? Declamations in favour of Ireland and of Russian liberty. Neither did he ever hesitate to place his long experience at the service of his country.

At intervals he would dedicate a touching message to some illustrious dead: Gordon, Robert Browning, Queen Victoria and, last of all, to Algernon Charles Swinburne. . . . Or he would commemorate by a poem the battle of Trafalgar, the anniversary of Nelson, or Garibaldi, or the centenary of Milton, whom he had regarded as the supreme master of blank verse, and whom he revered almost as a saint.

. . .

After Browning and Tennyson, Meredith reigned in his turn, but without governing as patriarch in the literary world. But everyone knew his home: Box Hill, in that merry county of Surrey, whose woodlands and pastures he had loved for so long—hard by the inn where Keats wrote his *Endymion* in 1817—and the hope of being one day admitted to Flint Cottage was a perpetual lure to young writers. . . .

Prophet and apostle, he lived at Box Hill as John the Baptist lived in the desert, as John the Evangelist at Patmos. Some favoured few listened to his words. His political poems themselves were not those easy refrains, after the manner of Béranger, which the crowd catches up in chorus. Less abstract, less ambiguous, they would have called forth charges of a most serious character. Nothing proves this better than the anxiety which was caused throughout the whole of the British Empire, on account of an interview on the subject of marriage, published in the *Daily Mail* of the 24th of September, 1904. But Meredith was hardly serious in proposing a temporary union to those who intended to marry. The contracting parties would sign for a period of three, six, nine years, renewable at the end of each term, on the condition that the State would legally recognise the offspring. . . .

Without being prodigal in his correspondence, he consented towards the end of his life to comment upon his works. We are cognizant of his correspondence by letter with the poet James Thomson. An exceedingly interesting letter which he wrote on the 22nd of July, 1887, to an American admirer has often been reprinted. But the smallest message from Meredith always had a touch of charm ; the brief note, entirely charged with matter, attested his mastery of the art of concentration.

Eager excitement on all sides at these periodical

disclosures; the value of his work indisputably admitted by the majority of English people; his election to the presidency of the Society of Authors after the death of Tennyson in 1892; the collection of his complete works undertaken by the publishing house of Constable and Co.; a congratulatory address, countersigned by thirty famous writers, in 1898, upon the occasion of his seventieth birthday; a visit from the members of "White Friars Club" to Flint Cottage in 1900; a special messenger from Edward VII, Sir Arthur Ellis, bringing to the paralysed poet the insignia of the Order of Merit, despite the statute which demanded that new recipients must receive their investiture at the hands of royalty itself—these tardy reparations in some degree forestalled the solemn thanksgiving of 1908. . . . Then England and America resounded with unanimous acclamations in honour of the octogenarian invalid, whose glory was the result but of his lofty genius. And some distinguished Frenchmen, Messrs. Anatole France, Paul Bourget, Jules Lemaître, Paul Hervieu, Alfred Mézières, Gaston Boissier, Alexandre Ribot and René Bazin, represented their grateful country in this message.

But it is a long while since that trying time when Henley, Thomson, Stevenson and J. M. Barrie championed the man whom they adored. . . . There is now a swarm of exegetes, annotators and philologists claiming to be authorities upon Mere-

dith's poems and novels. Mr. Richard Le Gallienne, in 1890, dedicated to Meredith a poem which, although somewhat confused, glowed with youthful enthusiasm. Then in turn came Miss Hannah Lynch's analysis, and the critical and biographical notes of Mr. Walter Jerrold; then Mr. Richard Curles' paraphrase, so intimate, so rich in suggestive comparison, so finely shaded; the masterly exposition of Mr. G. M. Trevelyan, consistent, supple, and a model of elegance and perspicuity; and then the very conscientious work of Mrs. Sturge Henderson. Books and articles began to be outpoured from the year 1898. In France, Marcel Schwob recounted in *Spicilège* (1894) his pilgrimage to Box Hill; Alphonse Daudet, in his personal notes, which will soon form the volume *Notes sur la Vie*,[1] and Mr. Charles Legras in *Chez nos Contemporains d'Angleterre.* A very skilful French translation of *The Essay upon Comedy* appeared under the auspices of Mr. H. D. Davray. Bibliographical accuracy demands a mention of the translation of *The Egoist.* *Le Mercure de France* published *The Tale of Chloe.* And in 1909 *The Tragic Comedians* was translated into our language under this title: *La Tragi-Comédie de l'Amour.*

George Meredith used to fascinate his visitors by

[1] Mme. Alphonse Daudet also has narrated (see *Revue de Paris*, 1st of January, 1896) her two interviews with George Meredith. . . . But we refrain from enumerating all the articles which French journals and reviews have devoted to the poet.

the expression upon his face. "His eyes, during the first few minutes in which he spoke to me, were literally intoxicated with thought," says Marcel Schwob. Meredith's brain worked without cessation. That workshop of ideas was not silenced when age and infirmity prevented the master from shutting himself up from ten in the morning to nine in the evening in the little two-roomed rustic hut, where he had his study. He remained there, sedentary and industrious, as a fisherman in his boat. "We imagine that the brain becomes weary. Do not believe it. The brain is never fatigued. It is the stomach that we overwork." And he added, smiling the while: "And I was born with a weak stomach."[1]

The great Goethe, proud of his eighty-four years, maintained that we die only when we consent to it. Meredith, whose power of resistance was not less, did not seem so positive. However, he despised death. "Death?" he would say, "I have lived long enough, I do not fear it; it is but the other side of the door; to die, is to pass from one room to another. . . ."[2]

But old age pained him. Despite the opinion of Sainte-Beuve, who welcomed old age as the best means that we had found for living a long time, Meredith railed against it, for he did not consider life as a period over which to pass as slowly as possible, and by the most pleasing route. He be-

[1] *Spicilège*, by Marcel Schwob. [2] *Ibid.*

lieved that every thinker, through self-sacrifice, contributed to the intellectual development of humanity. That is why, during his life, he suffered so much in losing that place for which earth had so well endowed him. . . . He complained to Mr. W. T. Stead that he was regarded as an old man :

" People talk about me as if I were an old man. I do not feel old in the least. . . . I take as keen an interest in the movement of life as ever, I enter into the passions of youth, and I watch political affairs and intrigues of parties with the same keen interest as of old. I have seen the illusion of it all, but it does not dull the zest with which I enter into it, and I hold more firmly than ever to my faith in the constant advancement of the race." [1]

And later to Mr. H. D. Davray :

" Old age has its drawbacks, and even its weaknesses, but I am jealous as a young man . . . and I surely have the advantage over you of being more experienced." [2]

He spoke the truth. Experience had not deadened his curiosity nor his power of sympathy. I saw upon a book-rack at his left hand several rows of books, magazines and reviews, for the most part in French, which account for the paternal interest he used to take in the progress of our young writers.

[1] *Review of Reviews*, March, 1904.

[2] See the excellent article by M. H. D. Davray, *Mercure de France*, 16th of June, 1909.

And I was surprised to hear him mention the recently published works of the Countess Mathieu de Noailles and of Gérard d'Houville. . . . It pleased him to know that we had women-poets and novelists. . . .

If old men generally chafe against their loneliness, Meredith did not appear to partake of their bitterness :

" I am never alone. My daughter and my son often pay me a surprise visit, and friends come almost every day. Even if no one comes, I never feel lonely. I have my own thoughts. . . ." [1]

He had, besides, the good fortune to keep to the end several of his friends. Admiral Maxse, the original of Nevil Beauchamp, was only taken from him in 1900. And often in speaking with Viscount Morley, Leslie Stephen, or Mr. Frederick Greenwood, he would forget the passing of the years. But the death of Swinburne, his old comrade, was a dire blow to him. Not satisfied with having written an affectionate and touching letter to Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton, he dedicated some very noble lines in *The Times* of the 15th of April, 1909, upon the death of the poet.

Even as from a wild cherry tree, all starred with white blossom, he had gained comfort, during the slow illness of his second wife in 1885, so again Meredith

[1] See the excellent article by M. H. D. Davray, *Mercure de France*, 16th of June, 1909.

impatiently awaited the first days of calm. He derived his chief consolation from his beloved lawns, from his fir trees and cedars at Mickleham. He might have been likened to the last of the Druids evoking the spirit of the oaks.

On the 4th of May, shortly before his death, he said: "Nature is my God, and I trust in her. . . . Without doubt, lovers of Nature, as long as they have contact with men, cannot escape suffering; but their burdens will be lightened since they themselves turn towards Nature. . . ." Then, suddenly the strong voice quavered; and broken and sad as that of a child who is ill, it murmured: "You know—now—they do not allow me to go out!" It was suggested to him that he could always be driven out. "Ah, yes!" replied he testily, "but I loathe it." His "unconquerable youthfulness"[1] bitterly resented the weaknesses of his body. And yet how glad he was each time they harnessed the grey donkey to the little chaise! . . .

At last he went out again on Friday, the 14th of May, after days of torrential rain, and after many weeks of indoor life. The low bank of cloud had lifted. Spring was just lightly touching the copses and the ploughed land, "that precocious spring which shivers still with cold."[2] Golden blossoms already bespangled the moistened earth; the

[1] H. D. Davray, article mentioned.
[2] *Invitation to the Country* poem, 1851.

cuckoo, the blackbird and the thrush from every branch proclaimed their joyous nuptials; the cawing of rooks resounded in the elms, and the lowing of the cattle in the meadows was heard from afar. . . . But the shadows of the low storm-clouds glided ceaselessly over the land; for these first weeks of May in England, though inviting, are very treacherous. Meredith shivered during that Saturday morning's ride. Upon his return he took to his bed. Vainly the doctors strove to allay the fever, and he was forbidden to get up. After a short and painful illness, on the 18th of May, 1909, at 3.35 in the morning, silently clasping his daughter's hand, George Meredith entered upon that rest, so profound, so perfect, that is followed by no awakening.

. . .

His remains were cremated. The hearse, drawn by two horses, followed the route from Flint Cottage to Woking. Some branches of brier and white lilac lay upon the oaken coffin, upon which a copper plate indicated the name and age of the departed, and the date of his death. This metal plate was afterwards fixed upon the casket which was to receive the ashes. There was no religious service during the cremation, at which only the family was present. Meredith would have liked his ashes to be cast to the winds. But the little urn of human dust was brought back to Flint Cottage.

The funeral took place on the morrow at 2.30 in

the afternoon at the cemetery of Dorking. The inhabitants of the village mingled with Meredith's admirers who had arrived by a special train ; but both in such small numbers that the simplicity of the obsequies was retained. There was an entire absence of speech. The casket containing the ashes, reverently carried by the poet's daughter, Mrs. H. P. Sturgis, and by her brother, Mr. William Maxse Meredith, was lowered into the grave, adorned by the humble flowers of the bramble. A clergyman muttered some Anglican prayers. But the only prayer needed by this disciple and lover of nature was the sounds of the birds, of the bees, and of the winds, which filled that peaceful enclosure during that brief and abrupt liturgy. The weather was beautiful. Never had the springtime in Britain burst forth in greater glee. . . .

At the same time, in London, in the venerable Westminster Abbey, the Dean conducted with great ceremony a requiem service. They adopted the same ritual for George Meredith as for the late Marquis of Salisbury. Some litanies, the Psalms XIII., CXXX., and XXIII. followed the Miserere, chanted in procession from the nave to the choir. The lesson was part of the fourth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, and there was sung Wesley's anthem, "All go to one place." Then, after some more prayers, and the hymn, "O God, our help in ages past," the Dean pronounced the Benediction.

Artists, men of letters, politicians, and the fashionable world thronged into Westminster. At last he was dead, that sculptor of strange figures ; he who laboured and strove for sixty years ! And that imposing assembly, where the ancient ritual was pronounced with zeal and ostentation, lavished upon his dead body the honours denied to his intellect.

But a soul, touched with the same tongue of fire, a visionary bathed in purest rays of light, rendered a brotherly homage to Meredith. Mr. Thomas Hardy cried :

Forty years back, when much had place
That since has perished out of mind,
I heard that voice, and saw that face.

He spoke as one afoot will wind
A morning horn ere men awake ;
His note was trenchant, smart, but kind.

He was of those whose words can shake
And riddle to the very core
The falsities that Time will break. . . .

Of late, when we two met once more,
The luminous countenance and rare
Shone just as forty years before.

So that, when now all tongues declare
He is unseen by his green hill,
I scarce believe he sits not there.

No matter. Further and further still
Through the world's vaporous vitiate air
His words wing on—as strong words will.[1]

[1] *G. M.* (1828–1909), poem by Thomas Hardy.

Let us believe Mr. Thomas Hardy. And no more let us seek around us the soul of the poet George Meredith—a soul which has passed into the light, up to the stars, as that blithe morning lark of which he has so often sung ! [1]

[1] We can imagine nothing more sweet, more touching, than the pages written by Mr. J. M. Barrie on the 22nd of May, 1909 (v. *George Meredith*, 1909, Constable and Co.). They form a worthy counterpart to Mr. Thomas Hardy's poem.

CHAPTER III

GEORGE MEREDITH'S GENIUS

MORE than ever since journalism has become general and more complete, one imagines that real masterpieces are capable of indefinite expansion. But when an old man, who is a genius, confines himself to solitude, without any other admirers than a mere handful of followers, one hardly dares to announce him as a man of talent. Why did he remain obscure? . . . Many people, who pretend to love literature, not having read any of Meredith's works, find Mr. Thomas Hardy's praises hyperbolical.

"Bring to us," they say ironically, "some of these marvellous messages which 'take wing as immortal words take wing upon the wind,' and explain to us why they have been so slow in reaching us. . . . If George Meredith is as entrancing as you say, why has he not been translated into French like Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, the sisters Brontë, Rudyard Kipling, or even as Mr. Thomas Hardy himself? France gives generous hearing to foreign authors. . . . How does it happen that

Meredith was not more celebrated during his lifetime ? . . ."

There is as much criticism as questioning. But this is not the place to reply. We will give elsewhere our opinion why George Meredith will never become a popular author. We will study the innumerable reasons which prevent the diffusion of his works. We shall see why both his verse and his prose are difficult of access ; why they do not appeal to translators ; why they rebuff the readers of newspaper serials, the frequenters of lending-libraries, and, above all, the indolent who seek in books any easy and exciting way of passing a few moments.

For the moment, with a view to learning something of what Meredith can teach us, let us analyse his achievements. The poet-novelist displays the most varied gifts. Which are the most striking ? George Meredith displays himself in turn, poet, story-teller, philosopher and wit. And of all these characters, the one first to attract our attention—provided that we have the necessary sensibility—to fascinate us and secure our sympathy for the other qualities, is George Meredith, the creator of beautiful stories. The secret of Meredith's irresistible magnetism, of his charm, of his fame, which will be upheld for ever by eager and faithful followers, despite his complicated thought and his extravagant style, is the richness of his imagination. He offers to us a magnificent picture-book. We begin by being

enraptured with the illustrations. We must feast our eyes upon the outlines, the forms and colours, before we decipher the stories and the text.

How is one to give an idea of this imagination? . . . To say that it is inexhaustible, that it bewilders on account of the depth and richness of its resource, that it makes an appeal to the most varied sentiments, that it mocks at obstacles, that it transforms the vilest thing into precious material —all this amounts to very little. One can hardly analyse a faculty so pulsating with life as imagination. Its flexibility baffles the rules of language. If one attempts to adapt for it a formula, it refuses to comply; it immediately creates, as if through malice, something unforeseen which destroys our endeavours. How is it possible to give a portrait resembling Shakespeare or Balzac to one who has never read a line of either? A Sainte-Beuve would not succeed in doing so. In order to judge of an imagination, it is necessary to have seen proofs of it. Rather, therefore, than weary ourselves with epithets, or approximate definitions, it seems preferable to relate some one of these beautiful stories, giving quotations which will serve as data, and will grant to the reader, as through a screen, a glimpse of the splendour of the original.

But Meredith's rich and romantic array is like a picture-gallery, where only the canvases of masters figure. Each of these pictures is distinguished by

some rare and brilliant characteristic. It would be an impossibility to make a choice, if one did not realise in the career of great artists some period particularly glorious, during which their genius radiates with a light as bright as that of the sun at its zenith. George Meredith reached his apogee about the age of forty.

It was at this period, after the publication of *Rhoda Fleming* and *Sandra Belloni*, and while *Beauchamp's Career* and *The Egoist* were in course of preparation, that he wrote *The Adventures of Harry Richmond*.

Although this book does not surpass the others in depth of thought, it is the one which many eminent men prefer, because nowhere has Meredith's fancy found such freedom. Uncurbed by philosophical reservations, George Meredith has been able to allow his imagination free scope ; and happy in feeling free, it has displayed for the first time the extent of its power. It is therefore *Harry Richmond* that we shall choose if the reader desires a specimen of Meredith. We shall do so with all the more assurance, as it is the only book which we can summarise without in any way doing an injustice. The loss of ornament does not deprive it of all beauty. Certainly George Meredith has never written a line without being in some degree esoteric ; but here, at least, the literal sense is quite sufficient in itself, and one can read *Harry Richmond* without worrying

oneself as to what lies beneath it. Neither an enigma, a poem in prose, an Oriental fantasy, a pamphlet, a pleading, a legal address, nor a parable, *Harry Richmond* pretends to be nothing more than a fine story.

This is evident at the beginning. Contrary to the other novels of Meredith, *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* do not begin with a tortuous preface, but with a prologue which has the boldness and the precision of a tale, the brightness of a fairy-story, and the pathos of a little one-act drama. This prologue gives the novel an unforgettable frontispiece. It testifies to the superior essence of an imagination which is ever displaying greater strength in later chapters. And forthwith the writer leads us into strange paths, and fairy lands, where a commonplace novelist would never venture.

But instead of prolonging these remarks, let the reader judge for himself! It is for him to decide if *Harry Richmond* is really a fine story. We will withdraw and leave him face to face with Meredith.

. . .

One midnight of a winter month, the occupants of Riversley Grange were awakened by the ringing of the outer bell, and by numerous blows upon the great hall-doors.

Squire Beltham was master there: the other members of the household were, his daughter Dorothy Beltham; a married daughter, Mrs. Richmond; Ben-

jamin Sewis, an old half-caste butler ; various domestic servants ; and a little boy, christened Harry Lepel Richmond, the squire's grandson. Riversley Grange lay in a rich watered hollow of the Hampshire heath-country ; a lonely circle of enclosed brook and pasture, within view of some of its dependent farms, but out of hail of them or any dwelling except the stables and the head-gardener's cottage.

There was, then, on this winter's night, a great commotion in the Grange. The domestics of both sexes hastily left their rooms and gathered together in the corridors. All, in their dismay, feared an attack by robbers. The only one who slept, in spite of the knocking, was Mr. Beltham.

The squire was a hunter of the old sort : a hard rider, deep drinker, and heavy slumberer. Before venturing to shake his arm Sewis struck a light and flashed it over the squire's eyelids to make the task of rousing him easier. At the first touch the squire sprang up, swearing by his Lord Harry he had just dreamed of fire, and muttering of buckets.

" Sewis ! you're the man, are you : where has it broken out ? "

" No, sir ; no fire," said Sewis ; " you be cool, sir."

" Cool, sir ! confound it, Sewis, haven't I heard a whole town of steeples at work ? I don't sleep so thick but I can hear, you dog ! Fellow comes here, gives me a start, tells me to be cool ; what the deuce ! nobody hurt, then ? all right ! "

The squire had fallen back on his pillow and was relapsing to sleep.

Sewis spoke impressively : " There's a gentleman

downstairs ; a gentleman downstairs, sir. He has come rather late."

The squire did not take the news seriously. He ordered them to give the visitor some hot brandy and water, and a bed. Then, thinking to look at his watch, he found that it was two o'clock in the morning. This put him into a violent temper, for he could not tolerate that anyone should enter his house at that time, and he cried :

" Lift him out o' the house on the top o' your boot, Sewis, and say it's mine ; you've my leave ! . . ."

The good Sewis retreated a step from the bedside. When he was at a safe distance, he fronted his master steadily and said :

" It's Mr. Richmond, sir."

" Mr. . . ." The squire checked his breath. That was a name never uttered at the Grange. " The scoundrel ? " he inquired harshly, half in a tone of one assuring himself, and his rigid dropped jaw shut.

The fact had to be denied or affirmed instantly, and Sewis was silent.

Grasping his bedclothes in a lump, the squire cried : " Downstairs ? downstairs, Sewis ? You've admitted him into my house ! "

" No, sir."

" You have ! "

" He is not in the house, sir."

" You have ! How did you speak to him, then ? "

" Out of my window, sir."

" What place here is the scoundrel soiling now ? "

" He is on the doorstep outside the house."

" Outside, is he ? and the door's locked ? "
" Yes, sir."
" Let him rot there ! "

But the patience of the midnight visitor had become exhausted, for he redoubled his blows upon the door ; and the squire, hearing the clamour, jumped out of bed, fastened on his clothes, and quickly ready, descended to the hall. Having sent away all the domestics except Sewis, he pushed aside the bolts, and threw the door open to the limit of the chain.

" Who's there ? " he demanded.

A response followed promptly from outside : " I take you to be Mr. Harry Lepel Beltham. Correct me if I err. Accept my apologies for disturbing you at a late hour of the night, I pray."

" Your name ? "

" Is plain Augustus Fitz-George Roy Richmond at this moment, Mr. Beltham. You will recognize me better by opening your door entirely : voices are deceptive. You were born a gentleman, Mr. Beltham, and will not reduce me to request you to behave like one. I am now in the position, as it were, of addressing a badger in his den. It is on both sides unsatisfactory. It reflects egregious discredit upon you, the householder."

The squire resolved to open the door wide to the fullest extent.

It was a quiet grey night, and as the doors flew open, a largely-built man, dressed in a high-collared great-coat and fashionable hat of the time, stood clearly defined to view. He carried a light cane, with the point of the

silver handle against his under lip. There was nothing formidable in his appearance, and his manner was affectedly affable. He lifted his hat as soon as he found himself face to face with the squire, disclosing a partially bald head, though his whiskering was luxuriant, and a robust condition of manhood was indicated by his erect attitude and the immense swell of his furred great-coat at the chest. His features were exceedingly frank and cheerful. From his superior height, he was enabled to look down quite royally on the man whose repose he had disturbed.

The squire curtly demanded his business.

"The grounds for my coming at all you will very well understand, and you will applaud me when I declare to you that I come to her penitent; to exculpate myself, certainly, but despising self-justification. I love my wife, Mr. Beltham. Yes; hear me out, sir. I can point to my unhappy star, and say, blame that more than me. That star of my birth and most disastrous fortunes should plead on my behalf to you; to my wife at least it will."

"You've come to see my daughter Marian, have you?"

"My wife, sir."

"You don't cross my threshold while I live."

"You compel her to come out to me?"

"She stays where she is, poor wretch, till the grave takes her. You've done your worst; be off."

"Mr. Beltham, I am not to be restrained from the sight of my wife."

"Scamp!"

"By no scurrilous epithets from a man I am bound to respect will I be deterred or exasperated."

"Damned scamp, I say!"

The squire gave vent to his fury. And he cursed anew the day when this charlatan, this adventurer, had presented himself for the first time at Riversley. Mr. Richmond was then honey-tongued; he used to sing with a languorous manner snatches of merry airs in a foreign and romantic language; he made mysterious allusions to his illustrious birth. By these means he bewitched Marian, one of the squire's two daughters. She consented to run away with him. But she was not slow to learn that she had married a rogue, and returned to her family. Too late, however; she became insane through shame and despair; so much so that she no longer recognised the members of her family, not even her own little boy.

"My wife deranged! I might presume it too truly an inherited disease. Do you trifle with me, sir? Her reason unseated! and can you pretend to the right of dividing us? If this be as you say—Oh! ten thousand times the stronger my claim, my absolute claim, to cherish her. Make way for me, Mr. Beltham. I solicit humbly the holiest privilege sorrow can crave of humanity. My wife! my wife! Make way for me, sir."

His figure was bent to advance. The squire shouted an order to Sewis to run round to the stables and slip the dogs loose.

It is in vain that, with angry imprecations and with most touching prayers, Mr. Richmond strove to appease his father-in-law. The latter remained

implacable. For sole reply, he whistled for his dogs. Then Mr. Richmond spoke :

" You claim a paternal right to refuse me : my wife is your child. Good. I wish to see my son."

On that point the squire was equally decided. " You can't. He's asleep."

" I insist."

" Nonsense : I tell you he's a-bed and asleep."

" I repeat, I insist."

" When the boy's fast asleep, man ! "

" The boy is my flesh and blood. You have spoken for your daughter—I speak for my son. I will see him, though I have to batter at your doors till sunrise."

Some minutes later the boy was taken out of his bed by his Aunt Dorothy. While dressing him, the good girl burst into tears ; she covered her nephew with convulsive caresses and told him to have no fear. A gentleman wanted to see him ; nothing more. But Miss Dorothy did not say whether the gentleman was a good man or a robber. She handed the little Harry to the butler Sewis, and when he had been deposited upon the floor of the hall, the child perceived the stranger upon the threshold. And it appeared to him that he was like the giants of fairy-books, when he saw him standing upon the steps, in the framework of sinister sky and darkling trees.

The squire wished to take his grandson by the hand and present him, but the stranger caught up the child. With cries of joy and tenderness, he

raised him in his arms, and embraced him, at the same time asking if he had forgotten his papa. The child replied that he had a mamma and a grandpapa, but no papa. Upon this, Mr. Richmond gave a deep groan and said angrily to the squire :

"You see what you have done ; you have cut me off from my own. Four years of separation, and my son has been taught to think that he has no father. By heavens ! it is infamous, it is a curst piece of inhumanity. Mr. Beltham, if I do not see my wife, I carry off my son."

"You take him from his mother ? " the squire sang out.

"You swear to me she has lost her wits ; she cannot suffer. I can."

"What ! Stop ! Not to take a child like that out of a comfortable house at night in Winter, man ? "

"Oh, the night is temperate and warm ; he shall not remain in a house where his father is dishonoured."

"Stop ! not a bit of it," cried the squire. "No one speaks of you. I give you my word, you're never mentioned by man, woman or child in the house."

"Silence concerning a father insinuates dishonour, Mr. Beltham."

The squire reddened with anger, and declared that if the child left Riversley, he should go for good, and that he should never receive a penny from his grandfather. And the squire called to his grandson :

"Here, Harry, come to me ; come to your grandad."

Mr. Richmond caught the boy just when he was turning to run.

"That gentleman," he said, pointing to the squire,

" is your grandpapa. I am your papa. You must learn at any cost to know and love your papa. If I call for you to-morrow or next day they will have played tricks with Harry Richmond, and hid him. Mr. Beltham, I request you, for the final time, to accord me your promise—observe, I accept your promise—that I shall, at my demand, to-morrow or the next day, obtain an interview with my wife."

The squire emphatically refused this demand. But he offered money; a cheque for a thousand pounds, and in addition fifty pounds a year, on condition that he should keep his grandson, and that Mr. Richmond should never again appear at Riversley. Besides, Mr. Beltham promised to make Harry his heir; he would bequeath to him Riversley Grange, and the best part of his property.

To which Mr. Richmond replied with unutterable contempt:

" You offer me money. That is one of the indignities belonging to a connection with a man like you. You would have me sell my son. To see my afflicted wife I would forfeit my heart's yearnings for my son; your money, sir, I toss to the winds; and I am under the necessity of informing you that I despise and loathe you. I shrink from the thought of exposing my son to your besotted selfish example. The boy is mine; I have him, and he shall traverse the wilderness with me. By heaven! his destiny is brilliant. He shall be hailed for what he is, the rightful claimant of a place among the proudest in the land; and mark me, Mr. Beltham, obstinate sensual old man that you are! I take the boy, and I consecrate my life to the duty of establishing

him in his proper rank and station, and there, if you live and I live, you shall behold him and bow your grovelling pig's head to the earth, and bemoan the day, by heaven! when you—a common country squire, a man of no origin, a creature with whose blood we have mixed ours—and he is stone-blind to the honour conferred on him—when you in your besotted stupidity threatened to disinherit Harry Richmond."

The door suddenly slammed with deafening noise, which put an end to further speech. The speaker remained at first bewildered. Then, as his little Harry was about to sob, he drew a pretty box from his pocket, and thrust a delicious sweetmeat between the child's lips. He dropped on one knee and carefully wrapped his charge in the folds of the shawl, and turning his back on Riversley Grange, he stepped out briskly towards the park.

In the distance the child faintly heard a voice coming from the Grange; a woman's voice, which he knew to be his Aunt Dorothy's. The cry vibrated but once: "Harry Richmond." Some minutes afterwards the child was out of hearing. . . .

. . .

By the dramatic intensity of this scene, the novelist at once grips the attention of the reader. Nevertheless, these first pages must be clearly separated from that which follows. The second chapter is in quite another vein. It is not George Meredith who gives us a piece of fiction; it is Harry Richmond himself, who relates his own story. And

this literary expedient has the effect of making the book more living, more natural.

In fact, nothing could be more natural than the way in which Harry enters upon an account of his astonishing adventures. And although there are lapses of memory, and he passes abruptly over a period of two or three years, and does not supply us with sufficient information with regard to the extraordinary circumstances of his life—we will scarcely quibble over these trifles, being at the outset prepossessed by his candour and convinced of his good faith.

. . .

Let us not then find fault with Harry Richmond —that child of four years!—for not having remembered more precisely the events which followed upon his departure from Riversley Grange. Some of his descriptions and experiences must suffice. It is much to us that he is able to remember his surprise when he heard for the first time the deafening roar of human voices and of vehicles. . . . Harry Richmond came to London. He would have suffered most cruelly from home-sickness, this child, so young, and companionless, and so recently brought from the country, if he had not had his father.

My father could soon make me forget that I was transplanted ; he could act dog, tame rabbit, fox, pony, and a whole nursery collection alive, but he was sometimes

absent for days, and I was not of a temper to be on friendly terms with those who were unable to captivate my imagination as he had done. When he was at home I rode him all round the room and upstairs to bed. I lashed him with a whip till he frightened me, so real was his barking; if I said "Menagerie" he became a caravan of wild beasts; I undid a button of his waistcoat, and it was a lion that made a spring, roaring at me; I pulled his coat-tails and off I went tugging at an old bear that swung a hind leg as he turned, in the queerest way, and then sat up and beating his breast sent out a mew-moan. Our room was richer to me than all the Grange while these performances were going forward.

Sunday was a time of delight for the child, as Mr. Richmond devoted the whole day to him.

Both of us attired in our best, we walked along the streets hand in hand; my father led me before the cathedral monuments, talking in a low tone of British victories, and commending the heroes to my undivided attention. I understood very early that it was my duty to imitate them. While we remained in the cathedral he talked of glory and Old England, and dropped his voice in the middle of a murmured chant to introduce Nelson's name or some other great man's: and this recurred regularly. "What are we for now?" he would ask me as we left our house. I had to decide whether we took a hero or an author, which I soon learnt to do with capricious resolution. We were one Sunday for Shakespeare; another for Nelson or Pitt. "Nelson, papa," was my most frequent rejoinder, and he never dissented, but turned his steps toward Nelson's cathedral dome, and uncovered his head there, and said: "Nelson, then, to-day"; and we went straight to his monument to perform the act of homage. There never

was so fascinating a father as mine for a boy anything under eight or ten years old.

Assuredly a manner of expressing hero-worship, which Thomas Carlyle had not foreseen ! . . .

Mr. Richmond made all Shakespeare's characters, from Falstaff to Shylock, pass before the wide-opened eyes of his son. And since a child would not be much interested in the career of William Pitt, Mr. Richmond had invented a means of making the orator more attractive: he attributed to William Pitt an inordinate liking for raspberry-jam tart. And Harry would devour such tarts on those occasions when his father wished to devote the Sunday to William Pitt.

Initiated in this manner, little Harry became a prodigy of learning. His father, not content with teaching him the piano, and some ideas of history, made him learn by heart the golden book of the Peerage. If Harry were asked :

" And who married the Dowager Duchess of Dewlap ? " he would reply with assurance, " John Gregg Wetherall, Esquire, and disgraced the family."

One evening, while the father and son were playing peacefully on hands and knees upon the floor, a gentleman entered, and invited Mr. Richmond to take a short walk with him in the town.

My father jumped up from his hands and knees, and abused him for intruding on his privacy, but afterwards he introduced him to me as Shylock's great-great-great-

grandson, and said that Shylock was satisfied with a pound, and his descendant wanted two hundred pounds, or else all his body: and this, he said, came of the emigration of the family from Venice to England. My father only seemed angry, for he went off with Shylock's very great-grandson arm-in-arm, exclaiming, "To the Rialto!"

As a matter of fact, Mr Richmond was arrested.

. . .

Harry did not know that there were such things as prisons for debts. He became sad at seeing his father no more. Doubtless his nurse, the faithful Mrs. Waddy, did not miss an opportunity of visiting the absent one; but she never allowed Harry to follow her. One day, as she had gone upon her errand of mercy, she left the door open, and Harry checked his longing no more: he ran after her, feeling certain of overtaking her at the corner of the street. Not finding her outside, he continued to walk on, expecting to arrive sooner or later at Westminster Abbey, or St. Paul's Cathedral. Upon his way he admired the large shops, and the goods displayed. . . . Then, towards sunset, hunger struck him like an arrow. . . . He was not the only one in this plight.

There was a boy in ragged breeches, no taller than myself, standing tiptoe by the window of a very large and brilliant pastry-cook's. He persuaded me to go into the shop and ask for a cake. I thought it perfectly natural to do so, being hungry; but when I reached the

counter and felt the size of the shop, I was abashed, and had to repeat the nature of my petition twice to the young woman presiding there.

"*Give* you a cake, little boy?" she said. "We don't give cakes, we sell them."

"Because I am hungry," said I, pursuing my request.

Another young woman came, laughing and shaking lots of ringlets.

"Don't you see he's not a common boy? he doesn't whine," she remarked, and handed me a stale bun, saying, "Here, Master Charles, and you needn't say thank you."

"My name is Harry Richmond, and I thank you very much," I replied.

I heard her say, as I went out, "You can see he's a gentleman's son." The ragged boy was awaiting me eagerly. "Gemini! You're a lucky one," he cried; "here, come along, curly-poll." I believe that I meant to share the bun with him, but of course he could not be aware of my beneficent intentions; so he treated me as he thought I was for treating him, and making one snatch at the bun, ran off, cramming it into his mouth. I stood looking at my hand. I learnt in that instant what thieving was, and begging, and hunger, for I would have perished rather than have asked for another cake.

Luckily for Harry, he most opportunely met an old gentleman, who in his astonishment wished to know why this pretty little boy was alone amongst the crowd. But poor Harry was unable to reply because of hunger. His tongue was not unloosed until he had made a splendid meal at the old gentleman's house. After a glass of wine—his first—he began to speak, and talked with ease of his

wonderful father, of Nelson and Shakespeare and even of the peerage. . . .

" By the way, are you upon the list of peers ? " he demanded of the old gentleman.

" Not yet."

" Well, then, I know nothing about you ! "

Upon which the old gentleman, his wife and daughter burst out laughing. Then, passing from one thing to another, they ended by extracting from the child some details about his family : Mr. Beltham was named, then Riversley Grange. Mr. Bannerbridge, which was the old gentleman's name, was a solicitor, and he gave information to the police. He was also putting himself into communication with Harry's grandfather, when Mrs. Waddy presented herself and energetically claimed the right to have Harry. The only thing to do was to hand him over to her.

. . .

It was not in London that Harry awaited his father's return, but at the village of Dipwell, at the house of Mrs. Waddy's brother-in-law and among the good and honest country folk who took great care of him. Besides, visitors, neighbours and playmates, all treated him with courteous consideration and attention, for Mrs. Waddy gave it to be understood that Harry was not " a child like the others." A charming interlude this at Dipwell ! Harry was hardly saddened by the announcement of his

mother's death. A young tailor came from London to measure him for a splendid suit of mourning. And Mr. Richmond, from his mysterious residence, sent the child an autographed document : the text of a prayer that he must repeat for the repose of his mother's soul. . . .

The touching message just preceded Mr. Richmond's arrival at Dipwell. He created a sensation there by arriving with postillions in advance of him wearing crape rosettes, as did the horses. In his son's name he eloquently thanked and rewarded the villagers. Little boys and girls obtained coins of silver and gold, so that father and son received the cheers and blessings of a grateful people.

The wicked men who had parted us were no longer able to do harm, he said. I forgot, in my gladness at their defeat, to ask what had become of Shylock's descendant.

Mrs. Waddy welcomed us when we alighted. Do not imagine that it was at the door of her old house. It was in a wide street opening on a splendid square, and pillars were before the houses, and inside there was the enchantment of a little fountain playing thin as whipcord, among ferns, in a rock-basin under a window that glowed with kings of England, copied from boys' history books. All the servants were drawn up in the hall to do homage to me. They seemed less real and living than the wonder of the sweet-smelling chairs, the birds, and the elegant dogs. Richest of treats, a monkey was introduced to me. "It's your papa's whim," Mrs. Waddy said, resignedly ; "he says he must have his jester. Indeed it is no joke to me." Yet she smiled happily, though her

voice was melancholy. From her I now learnt that my name was Richmond Roy, and not Harry Richmond. I said, " Very well," for I was used to change.

Before the bed which was placed for him—a beautiful little pink bed, having a crown over it—Harry cried aloud with delight :

" Don't you like it, Mrs. Waddy ? " I said.

She smiled and sighed. " Like it ? Oh ! yes, my dear, to be sure I do. I only hope it won't vanish."

Mr. Richmond, or rather Richmond Roy, as he now designated himself, intended that his son should be educated like a prince. Lessons in boxing, pony-riding, and Latin were duly given to him. His French lessons were entrusted to a French governess, who was charged to take special care of his pronunciation.

On fine afternoons I was dressed in black velvet for a drive in the park, where my father uncovered his head to numbers of people, and was much looked at. " It is our duty, my son, never to forget names and persons ; I beg you to bear that in mind, my dearest Richie," he said. We used to go to his opera-box ; and we visited the House of Lords and the House of Commons ; and my father, though he complained of the decay of British eloquence, and mourned for the days of Chatham, and William Pitt (our old friend of the cake and the raspberry jam), and Burke, and Sheridan, encouraged the orators with approving murmurs.

Sometimes the child suffered from melancholy : would he again be suddenly separated from his

father, and transported to an unknown place? Richmond Roy vowed by the gods that such a disaster was impossible, unless the most terrible upheavals occurred. And in order to drive away or divert these gloomy thoughts from the child's mind, he would read aloud the *Arabian Nights;* or what was better still, he would act out the incidents for him, and each time with such sallies of wit, such playful touches, such incomparable improvisations, that Harry became, more than ever, delighted with his father. Richmond Roy was adored by the servants. Nothing could prevent them from loving him, said Mrs. Waddy, who more than anyone had succumbed to his charm. . . .

When they undertook long journeys upon the Continent, it seemed to the child that they travelled upon an enchanted carpet; like that one in the Arabian tales. The cities appeared or disappeared "as in an animated book of geography, opening or shutting at random." His father met a number of acquaintances everywhere. At Venice they became intimate with Colonel Goodwin and his daughter. This young lady, named Clara, took a fancy to Harry. She advised him, when he grew up, to drop the odious name of Roy. They separated. More than once afterwards Clara was to play an important part in Harry's life.

When they returned to London, they received unexpectedly a visit from Miss Dorothy Beltham,

who was accompanied by Mr. Bannerbridge. Harry was overjoyed at seeing his aunt again. But as she begged him to go with her to Riversley, the lad became sad, being unable to make up his mind to leave his father. In the end Miss Dorothy had to go away in tears, leaving Harry behind.

The door closed on them and I thought it was a vision that had passed. But now my father set my heart panting with questions as to the terrible possibility of us two ever being separated. In some way he painted my grandfather so black that I declared earnestly I would rather die than go to Riversley; I would never utter the name of the place where there was evil speaking of the one I loved dearest. "Do not, my son," he said solemnly, "or it parts us two." I repeated after him, "I am a Roy and not a Beltham." It was enough to hear that insult and shame had been cast on him at Riversley for me to hate the name of the place.

In order to be compensated for the loss of Riversley, due to Mr. Beltham's villainy, the father and son went away shortly afterwards into the country. The curb-chains and the bells of their team tinkled merrily upon the high road. The livery of coachman, footman and postillion was scarlet, of the exact shade worn by lackeys of the royal family.

We had an extraordinary day. People stood fast to gaze at us; in the country some pulled off their hats and set up a cheer. The landlords of the inns where we baited remained bare-headed until we started afresh, and I, according to my father's example, bowed and lifted my cap gravely to persons saluting us along the

roads. Nor did I seek to know the reason for this excess of respectfulness ; I was beginning to take to it naturally. At the end of a dusty high road, where it descends the hill into a town, we drew up close by a high red wall, behind which I heard boys shouting at play. We went among them, accompanied by their master. My father tipped the head boy for the benefit of the school, and following lunch with the master and his daughter, to whom I gave a kiss at her request, a half-holiday was granted to the boys in my name. How they cheered ! The young lady saw my delight, and held me at the window while my father talked with hers ; and for a long time after I beheld them in imagination talking : that is to say, my father issuing his instructions and Mr. Rippenger receiving them like a pliant hodman ; for the result of it was that two days later, without seeing my kings of England, my home again, or London, I was Julia Rippenger's intimate friend and the youngest pupil of the school.

Did Richmond Roy imagine that this school was a charitable institution ? Perhaps. . . . Having entrusted his son to Mr. Rippenger, he disappeared, and left no trace behind him, and even neglected to pay his son's fees.

Unfortunately, Surrey House, the school over which Mr. Rippenger ruled with a brutal hand, was not an almshouse " either for the sons of gentlemen of high connection, or for the sons of vagabonds." Pupils were not kept there gratuitously. After having been the privileged favourite of the principal, the Benjamin of the establishment, Harry Richmond saw his star wane and finally vanish. Instead of

drawing largely upon Mr. Rippenger for pocket-money, he soon found he had not even a penny. A suit of coarse cloth was substituted for the becoming one of black velvet. And the birch and the rough usage to which he was subjected aggravated his mental suffering.

Even this could have been borne if the poor abandoned lad had occasionally received a letter from his father. But he had only the ever-faithful and helpful friendship of Mr. Rippenger's beautiful daughter, and the sympathy of his companions, as a stimulant for his courage. His schoolmates did not illtreat him. In their eyes Harry was still glorified : he was always to them the little boy who was welcomed and treated with almost royal honours, and in honour of whom a half-holiday had been granted. And even though Mr. Rippenger publicly scoffed at impostors and charlatans, and manifested his disgust for swindlers and their children, Harry's friends did not desert him. On the contrary, they lavished their sympathy upon him and admired him because he bore his misfortunes with an imperturbable dignity. This patience, which remained constant, this composure of mind amidst misfortune, gained for him the kind attention of little Temple, and the affectionate friendship of the renowned Walter Heriot, the cricket champion, and the best pupil in the school ; the most handsome and athletic figure ; the one who dared make

love to Julia, and who even crossed swords with the redoubtable Mr. Rippenger himself.

The weeks, months, and years passed sadly by, and Harry Richmond yearned to see his father again. But where should he find him? He had no idea. By dint of fostering nothing but this desire, he became as one subject to hallucinations. In the class, with his eyes closed, he would dream that he was leaving for ever his prison of "Surrey House," and that, free to do as he wished, he was following the one desire of his heart, and seeking his father.

As no gaolers are incorruptible, Harry took advantage of an excursion to detach himself from his schoolfellows, and find a hiding-place; then, without any loss of time, betook himself towards Riversley. What did he intend to do? To embrace his aunt, ask her for information, grasp the hand of the old half-caste butler, and then go in search of his father.

The first part of this plan was easy to achieve, seeing that he was in the neighbourhood of Riversley Grange. But Harry indiscreetly attached himself upon the route to a young gipsy girl named Kiomi. She was returning to her tribe, which was camping on the borders of Mr. Beltham's estate. They had no sooner arrived at Riversley than the gipsies, tempted by the chance of a liberal reward, acquainted the squire of the presence of his grandson; and Harry, who at most expected but to view the

Grange, was suddenly seized by a lady who had descended from a carriage, and whom he recognised as his good Aunt Dorothy.

It was thus that Harry Richmond became again installed at Riversley. It was in the following language that the squire welcomed his grandson :

" Look here ; your name is Harry Richmond in my house—do you understand ? My servants have orders to call you Master Harry Richmond, according to your christening. You were born here, sir, you will please to recollect. I'll have no vagabond names here "—he puffed himself hot, muttering, " Nor vagabond airs neither."

Ill-timed warnings ! They pierced to the quick the young lad just escaped from school, and who burned with impatience to cast himself into his father's arms. With what superb scorn Harry received the advice of the old butler Sewis, who recommended him, in order to find favour with Mr. Beltham, to show a keen interest in the stables, and to drink claret with the squire in the evening. " Here's a way of gaining a relative's affection ! " sighed Harry. Nevertheless, he was delighted not to see again his odious schoolmaster, for Mr. Beltham had paid off every penny of Mr. Rippenger's long account. The methods, the punctiliousness and the generosity of his grandfather impressed Harry very much.

As for Mr. Beltham, he was not slow to notice in

Harry his likeness to the Belthams. Ah, yes! He was assuredly of his own race; this boy, who put his horse so bravely at hedges and ditches, and who kept his head after dinner over a bottle of Bordeaux; this healthy, well-balanced, impetuous and frank lad, the joy of his old age!

Thus I grew in his favour, till I heard from him that I was to be the heir of Riversley and his estates, but on one condition, which he did not then mention.

This condition was not in the least inhuman. In short, Mr. Beltham meant Harry Richmond to marry Janet Ilchester. She was the daughter of the squire's cousin, who was much less fortunate than himself; Janet charmed both Mr. Beltham and Miss Dorothy by her animation, her impetuousness, her integrity, and her gallant behaviour on horseback. Without doubt she would have become equally a favourite of Harry's, if she had not at the outset wounded his sensibility.

In her thoughtlessness she said to him suddenly:

"Oh! dear, we are good friends, aren't we? Charley says we shall marry one another some day, but mama's such a proud woman she won't much like your having such a father as you've got unless he'd be dead by that time and I needn't go up to him to be kissed."

I stared at the girl in wonderment, but not too angrily, for I guessed that she was merely repeating her brother's candid speculations upon the future. I said: "Now mind what I tell you, Janet: I forgive you this once, for you are an ignorant little girl and know no

better. Speak respectfully of my father or you never see me again."

The frequent returns of these quarrels embittered Harry against his cousin. Janet, a thousand times too proud to acknowledge there and then her mistake, afterwards repented. And as she was fond of her cousin—Harry is represented as a handsome lad—she sought Mr. Beltham, to whom she related her indiscretion, and whom she begged to obtain Harry's forgiveness. The old squire immediately intervened. Unhappily, he also lacked delicacy, and his rough treatment so wounded Harry anew, that he sought flight, suffocating with rage, and burning for liberty. He wandered into the country, over land and heath. Towards sunset, the squire became troubled, and repented of his brusque dealing with his grandson, and despatched an express messenger upon horseback to beg him to return.

I rode home like a wounded man made to feel proud by victory, but with no one to stop the bleeding of his wounds; and the more my pride rose, the more I suffered pain. There at home sat my grandfather, dejected, telling me that the loss of me a second time would kill him, begging me to overlook his roughness, calling me his little Harry and his heir.

All in vain! Harry listened with disdain to these declarations of love; the old man's outbursts displeased him; an enemy angered with his father, could have no right to his indulgence.

So he wrestled to express his hatred of my father without offending me; and I studied him coldly, thinking that the sight of my father in beggar's clothes, raising a hand for me to follow his steps, would draw me forth, though Riversley should beseech me to remain clad in wealth.

With infinitely more perspicacity than the squire, Janet, guided by a woman's intuition, perceived that to be loved by Harry, she must treat him as did Miss Dorothy or the old butler, and never gainsay his filial affection. Some affectionate words left her lips: the result was magnetic. Harry was contrite: he made a confidante of his cousin, and told her of his aspirations and of his ever-present despondency, and that all-pervading desire to find his father again; at the same time he delighted her by relating incidents of his school-life, by a picturesque account of the merry tricks that, with Heriot and Temple, he had played upon Mr. Rippenger.

. . .

But these outpourings were not sufficient to allay so feverish a spirit. For this reason Miss Dorothy invited young Temple to Riversley. In order to divert her nephew's attention, she organised a series of daily delights: balls, excursions, fishing or hunting-parties. Poor remedies! And besides, what games, what presents or friends were sufficient diversion for Harry, after receiving an illustrated card on St. Valentine's Day?

The standard of Great Britain was painted in colours at the top; down each side, encircled in laurels, were kings and queens of England with their sceptres, and in the middle I read the initials, A. F-G. R. R., embedded in blue forget-me-nots. I could not doubt it was from my father. Riding out in the open air as I received it, I could fancy in my hot joy that it had dropped out of heaven.

"He's alive; I shall have him with me; I shall have him with me soon!" I cried to Temple. "Oh! why can't I answer him? where is he? what address? Let's ride to London."

Temple's nature was more practical, and he endeavoured to reason with his schoolmate.

"Yes, but," said he, "if he knows where you are, and you don't know where he is, there's no good in your going off adventuring. If a fellow wants to be hit, the best thing he can do is to stop still."

Harry rejected this advice. On the same day he overheard some significant remarks spoken in an undertone by his excellent neighbours, Gregory and William Bulsted. He concluded that his father must be the man on the Bench. But what was the Bench? When Temple was questioned, he prevaricated; the Bench, why it was a part of London! . . . Harry asked no more questions; he decided that he would go to London without acquainting the family, and that Temple should accompany him.

. . .

Once more through the streets of London—streets innumerable, and fantastical, veiled with the

vapours of a thick fog—Harry Richmond sought his father. As in the days of his early childhood, he went along as in a dream, discerning nothing in the fog, yet nevertheless, so absorbed in his search, never doubting but that he would reach his father's mysterious habitation, the Bench. . . . They had now walked for many hours ; night had fallen and the fog became luminous. Temple and Harry came to a place where an immense crowd had assembled. Two or three buildings were on fire. Opposite to these, the high and sombre walls of a monument were illuminated in the light of the flames. A common-looking girl was pointing out these walls to her companion. "You see," she said, "the Bench does not burn!"

Harry turned around suddenly and questioned the two women ; they informed him that the Bench was the debtors' prison. . . .

As it was necessary to await the rising of the sun in order to visit the Bench, Temple and Harry wandered about in the company of the two girls, through the muddy and deserted streets. Both lads were exhausted through want of nourishment. But the bars and hotels were closed. Suddenly one of the girls was accosted by her lover, named Joe. The latter, a jolly tar, promised the four some refreshment if they would come with him to his ship. The offer was accepted, as no choice was left. They huddled together, as well as possible

in the boat, and rowed towards the ship. On board, Harry had no sooner swallowed a glass of rum than he fell into a deep sleep.

. . .

Upon opening their eyes, the two friends realised with astonishment that they were moving. They raced up to the bridge ; yes, the boat was in progress ; it was just leaving the estuary of the Thames, and sailing out to sea ! . . . Their friend, Joe, the sailor, apologised profoundly. Having been unable to awaken them at an opportune moment, he could henceforward do nothing for them, as the sole master upon the *Priscilla* was the captain, Jasper Welsh.

The captain—oh ! a rare personality, a man half serious, half humorous, a puritan jack-tar !—had reached his post at the time of setting sail, when he was shown the two sleeping youths. They slept unblushingly, like two young debauchees who, after an orgy, heavily sleep away their drunkenness ; the disorder of their clothes seemed to accuse them of disorderly conduct. After having reflected a little, the captain resolved to inflict upon them a penance for their sins : he would pluck them from temptation by taking them with him ! . . . And as Captain Jasper Welsh was a hard man, neither Temple nor Harry was able to convince him that they were innocent ; they could not obtain permission to be returned to their families. The voyage

continued. . . . For the sake of peace, after the first outburst of revolt, the young stowaways submitted, but not without reprisals. At the table, to the horror of the old puritan, they affected to disparage Holy Scripture, to the glory of Latin and Greek. . . . The good captain came near to losing his appetite.

They at last reached one of the Hanseatic ports of north Germany. Temple and Harry, piloted by Joe, went on shore, and in order to obtain some harmless amusement, entered a theatre. As English are to be found everywhere, they fell in with Harry's old and excellent friends the Goodwins. . . . It was pure chance. But neither the colonel nor his daughter Clara realised this. "I suppose you're going," they said heedlessly to Harry, as if it were something obvious, "to join your father at the court of the Prince of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld?"

The Goodwins were no friends of Richmond Roy. What was their distress on finding that they had spoken too hastily, and that but for that, Harry would not have known where his father was! Grieved at their indiscretion, they endeavoured to make reparation, but too late! . . . In vain they pleaded on Mr. Beltham's behalf, and explained to Harry that all his future depended upon Riversley and upon his grandfather, but their eloquence was of no avail. Having purchased a map of Germany, Harry wrote to his aunt and the squire, explaining

his misadventure; then he set out with Temple in the diligence which would deposit them some leagues from Sarkeld. . . .

. . .

They descended from the diligence, and walked on in the direction of Sarkeld, when they encountered an amazon. She was a little lady attended by a tawny-faced and great square-shouldered groom. She wore white gauntlets, a warm winter-jacket of grey fur over a riding-habit of the same colour. A white boa, hanging loose, encircled her neck and her figure. A plume surmounted a pretty black felt hat with a large brim. With one hand on her hip, and holding in the other her whip and reins, with some strands of golden brown hair straying over her flushed cheeks, the young girl appeared to be twelve or thirteen years of age. Behind her rose some rocks and trees, high silver firs, and the hoofs of her pony bathed in the clear water from a cascade.

Was this the right road to Sarkeld? The girl replied that it was. . . . But that this morning everybody was going towards the castle of Bella Vista, on the summit of the hill, where the Prince of Eppenwelzen was unveiling the statue of his ancestor, Marshal Prince Albert Wohlgemuth of Eppenwelzen, whose name was made immortal by the brilliant victories he gained during the wars of the seventeenth century. What incited public

curiosity, and made the occasion an important one, was, that the reigning Prince of Eppenwelzen, who was exceedingly parsimonious, had hesitated for a long time about erecting this statue. His sister, the witty and whimsical Margravine of Rippau, had laughed at him: "You do not wish it? "Ah, well! I will order the statue and have it set up in a week." In fact, to the very day the statue was there. And now they were going to see how the Margravine had been able to keep her word, how an equestrian statue could have been ordered, sculptured, cast and delivered at Sarkeld, and erected in less than eight days.

The young amazon urged the lads to postpone their journey to Sarkeld for a while. What! one of them was Mr. Richmond Roy's son? . . . Oh, well! Mr. Richmond himself would most certainly be present at the ceremony. . . .

How charming she was, this little stranger, prattling away in broken English! She pointed out the summit of the hill. Temple and Harry followed her. . . . And Harry marvelled that this enchantress should have met him upon the road to Sarkeld, upon the road which led to his father! . . .

. . .

When they reached the top of the hill the crowd, which was already large, made way, respectfully saluting the Princess. For the young amazon was none other than Ottilia Wilhelmina Frederika

Hedwig, only child of Prince Ernest of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld.

She presented the two young Englishmen to her aunt, the Margravine of Rippau, a rather stout woman, whose eyes and lips were continually in restless movement. The Margravine greeted them with marked kindness, when she learnt Harry's name, and whom he sought at Sarkeld.

Around the statue, covered with a huge white awning, the police and keepers had cleared an open space, which was roped off. The crowd was dense and noisy, but could not silence the blare of a military band which played in turns waltzes and marches.

Temple and Harry would have been lost in the crowd if Princess Ottilia had not had the graciousness to entrust them to her English governess, Miss Sibley, and to lend them two pretty Hungarian horses. These attentions delighted Harry immensely. To complete his happiness, there only remained the finding of his father. Alas! among so many onlookers there was no sign of Richmond Roy.

The Prince of Eppenwelzen, upon horseback, approached the statue. The cannon thundered a volley. And while the band broke forth into a slow and pompous march, the tent was drawn aside like a curtain.

I confess I forgot all thought of my father for a while; the shouts of the people, the braying of the brass instru-

ments, the ladies cheering sweetly, the gentlemen giving short hearty expressions of applause, intoxicated me. And the statue was superb—horse and rider in new bronze polished by sunlight.

The Marshal was acknowledging the salute of his army after a famous victory over the infidel Turks. He sat upright, almost imperceptibly but effectively bending his head in harmony with the curve of his horse's neck, and his baton swept the air low in proud submission to the honours cast on him by his acclaiming soldiery. His three-cornered lace hat, curled wig, heavy-trimmed surcoat, and high boots, reminded me of Prince Eugene. No Prince Eugene—nay, nor Marlborough, had such a martial figure, such an animated high old warrior's visage. The bronze features reeked of battle.

Admiration was unanimous. Immediately everyone rushed towards the Margravine's carriage to congratulate her. Some bowed to her, others kissed her hand. The noble lady smiled, receiving their homage with evident satisfaction. The young Englishmen followed their example, and Miss Sibley acted as interpreter when their turn came to pass before the Margravine.

Smiling cordially, the Margravine spoke, Miss Sibley translated :

" Her Royal Highness asks you if you have seen your father ? "

I shook my head.

The Princess Ottilia translated :

" Her Highness, my good aunt, would know, would you know him, did you see him ? "

" Yes, anywhere," I cried.

The Margravine pushed me back with a gesture.

"Yes, your Highness, on my honour; anywhere on earth!"

She declined to hear the translation.

Poor Harry had to be silent. A court poet began to recite a grandiloquent and wordy ode which seemed endless. The performance wearied the Margravine, and she returned to the attack:

"Her Highness," Miss Sibley translated, "asks whether you are prepared to bet that your father is *not* on the ground?"

"Beg her to wait two minutes, and I'll be prepared to bet any sum," said I.

Temple and Harry upon horseback inspected the bystanders who surrounded the statue. And when the poet had at last finished his declamation, and he had been coldly applauded, Temple cried to his friend:

"Richie! now let's lead these fellows off with a tip-top cheer!"

Little Temple crowed lustily.

This gave events a miraculous turn.

The head of the statue turned from Temple to me.

I found the people falling back with amazed exclamations. I—so prepossessed was I—simply stared at the sudden-flashing white of the statue's eyes. The eyes, from being an instant ago dull carved balls, were animated. They were fixed on me. I was unable to give out a breath. Its chest heaved; both bronze hands struck against the bosom.

"Richmond! my son! Richie! Harry Richmond! Richmond Roy!"

That was what the statue gave forth.

My head was like a ringing pan. I knew it was my father, but my father with death and strangeness, earth, metal, about him; and his voice was like a human cry contending with earth and metal—mine was stifled. I saw him descend. I dismounted. We met at the ropes and embraced. All his figure was stiff, smooth, cold. My arms slid on him.

. . .

This strange sight produced panic. Women fainted. Workmen and keepers hurried towards the statue to seize it. There was a violent altercation between the bronze statue and the master of the revels. As for the Prince of Eppenwelzen, furious at having been duped, he raved at both, and then rode away at a gallop in the direction of Sarkeld. Then, as by a miracle, all around the pedestal the crowd fell silent, scattered, dispersed, and vanished; gentlemen and ladies took leave of the Margravine with more hand-kissings and reverences; soon there remained upon the hill no one but Princess Ottilia, Miss Sibley, the two young Englishmen, the walking statue, and the Margravine. The latter, now that they were alone, gave way to abusive words and recriminations. Richmond Roy, who was the object of her anger, could scarcely defend himself; a heavy coating of paint and plaster paralysed all the muscles of his face. He

received the torrent of her abuse without wincing. Only as the Margravine's carriage was borne away in a whirlwind of dust did he vow, not however without some trouble, that the noble lady should never see him again.

. . .

Harry took part in this scene as one in a dream. All minor surprises merged in one general amazement. "What," thought he, "this is my father, and I am not overjoyed or grateful!" It was vain to press his father's hand; his once beloved parent was no longer the same man. Alas! this feeling was quite natural. Harry's idol had been the gay companion of his childhood. But years had passed away, years at school, and at Riversley, and now Harry realised, despite himself, that this too plausible father was a madman and a mountebank. Harry no longer felt the unaccountable and irresistible impulse which had drawn him to Sarkeld. On the contrary, for the first time a mistrust, dislike and shame possessed him. In order to dispel this vexation, and to regain Harry's favour, all Richmond Roy's affability was necessary. He displayed courtesy and paternal bounty to Temple, and entertained both young men with charming hospitality at the castle which the Margravine had placed at his disposal, so that he might rehearse in secret his rôle of an equestrian statue. By the time that Richmond Roy had washed and arranged himself in an

evening-suit, he had completely reasserted himself over the heart and mind of his son.

What an extraordinary being was Richmond Roy! Never was there a person who lived less in the past; the present absorbed him, and the future still more. To demand of him an account of his former doings was to put him out of patience. Provided that he gave pleasure and entranced his hearers, his conscience slept. . . . For this reason he gave no explanation of his desertion of Harry at school.

> "Business, business! sad necessity! hurry, worry—the hounds!" was his nearest approach to an explicit answer; and seeing I grieved his kind eyes, I abstained.

Richmond Roy's most profound regret was that he had failed to maintain the essential duty of a statue, immobility. And what a wrench it would be to him to exchange for the monotonous round of London life, the gaieties of a court, be it even a German court, and a small one! But becoming acquainted of Harry's meeting with the Princess Ottilia he recovered his serenity, and with the air of a diplomat, rubbed his hands, and declared that since his stay in Germany he had never ceased to labour for his son's welfare. He hinted that Princess Ottilia, being of a romantic and enthusiastic disposition, professed a liking for English poetry; that her ideal hero was the English sailor, per-

sonified in Nelson. Certainly, the dreadful affair upon the hill rendered it quite impossible for Richmond Roy to remain at Sarkeld. Nevertheless, his campaign had not been fruitless. He had made the first steps along the road to triumph. Upon the morning of their departure, he awoke his son, saying to him with pride:

"Here, Richie"—he pressed fresh violets on my nostrils—"you have had a morning visitor. Quick out of bed, and you will see the little fairy crossing the meadow."

I leapt to the window in time to have in view the little Princess Ottilia, followed by her faithful gaunt groom, before she was lost in the shadow of the fir trees.

. . .

Despite this floral offering, Harry determined to set out towards England. Having found his father again he thought of reconciling him to his grandfather, and thus establishing the family peace. Nothing more inconceivable. At Riversley, Harry had at first to atone for his long escapade. He affected to show himself a "thoroughbred" Beltham, and to be more than ever enamoured of stables and kennels. These artifices seemed to prove a success, but the squire, though apparently relenting, did not believe in the change; he knew too well that Harry's affections belonged entirely to Richmond Roy.

I am sure the poor old man suffered pangs of jealousy; I could even at times see into his breast and pity him. He wanted little more than to be managed; but a youth when he perceives absurdity in opposition to him chafes

at it as much as if he were unaware that it is laughable. Had the squire talked to me in those days seriously and fairly of my father's character, I should have abandoned my system of defence to plead for him as before a judge. By that time I had gained the knowledge that my father was totally of a different construction from other men. I wished the squire to own simply to his lovable nature. I could have told him women did.

At this point we may mention that Richmond Roy had friends other than Miss Dorothy and the faithful Mrs. Waddy. He continued to give delight to the fair sex even after the age of forty. This is exemplified at Bath, when he fascinated an heiress of nineteen, a young girl of great wealth, who was so enamoured of him that she wished to marry him then and there. This absurd idyll shocked polite society. But Richmond Roy had no more desire for a marriage than had Casanova. Shy after his first disastrous experience, he did not accept the young lady's hand which was offered to him so readily. Besides—and it is a characteristic trait of this unaccountable being—money had no more hold upon Richmond Roy than Richmond Roy upon money. His resources were small. They were reduced to an annuity which was paid to him half-yearly, and which he was obliged to squander immediately, as a kind of protest against its amount. During six months of the year he dragged out a miserable existence ; during the other six he lived a gay and merry life.

I penetrated his mystery enough to abstain from questioning him, and enough to determine that on my coming of age he should cease to be a pensioner, petitioner, and adventurer.

When he came of age Harry entered into possession of seventy thousand pounds. Besides, he was duly informed that his grandfather would settle upon him estates and money to the value of twenty thousand pounds per annum, on condition that he would marry Janet Ilchester. Harry made no reply to this conditional offer. Upon this, the mortified squire was persuaded that a continental tour, combined with serious study, would serve in the interests of Janet. But as he feared that his grandson would fall into the hands of Richmond Roy, he gave Harry in charge of the Rev. Ambrose Peterborough. A worthless precaution, for Richmond Roy found no difficulty in duping the simple ecclesiastic : he made a binding agreement with him, so that Harry effected his voyage with an all-powerful father on the one hand, and a tutor on the other who was reduced to the position of honorary chaplain.

. . .

The Margravine of Rippau and Princess Ottilia happened to be staying at Ostend when the three Englishmen landed there. The doctors had prescribed sea air for the young Princess, who had met with an accident while on horseback. Ottilia and Harry were much moved at seeing each other again.

And while they recounted with delight the circumstances of their first meeting, Richmond Roy furtively watched their expressions and gestures.

But interviews could not be long or effective upon the sea-front, on account of the crowd and public curiosity. That is the reason that Richmond Roy vanished, after having received a blank cheque from his son. He returned in triumph upon a yacht, chartered at great expense, and fitted out so magnificently that no refinement of comfort or luxury had been omitted, not even the French cook, whose task was to save them from the inconvenience of indigestible dishes. The Margravine, always delighted with change, did not conceal her pleasure. The voyage which was undertaken—a cruise around the coasts of France and England—was truly an enchanted one.

A hammock had been suspended upon deck in which Ottilia passed both day and night, feasting her eyes upon the laughing seas; and when she turned her gaze upon her companions, her eyes sparkled through pure delight. Before the low green coasts of Devon she cried: "That is England!" and she expressed a wish to go nearer to the coast. When she saw some fisher-folk mending their nets, and some boys and girls sitting astride the keel of an upturned boat, she shed tears. Was her admiration for England blending with her tenderness towards Harry? One night, while the yacht was sailing

merrily before the wind, a night when the sea was smooth and phosphorescent, her eyelids closed. Her hand, which had wandered over the silken coverlet, came to the edge of the hammock, and touched Harry's hand. And the Princess held it softly until she fell asleep. . . .

. . .

When the yachting tour was over, all was changed; in a little city of Würtemberg they met Prince Ernest of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld, and his nephew Prince Otto, a captain of the Austrian Lancers. A vigilant chaperon, Baroness Turckems, took charge of Princess Ottilia. But Prince Ernest, who had not forgotten the fraud practised upon him at Bella Vista, and who still had bitter memories of the false statue, demanded apologies from Richmond Roy, which were straightway refused. They parted coldly and without the customary adieux.

When Harry, with his father and the ever-present Mr. Peterborough, arrived before the summit upon which is erected the family residence of the Hohenzollerns, he saw the Princess's attendant riding towards him: the great and good-natured Schwartz, with a military salute, placed in his hand a bouquet of roses. . . .

May a man write of his foolishness?—tears rushed to my eyes. Schwartz was far behind us when my father caught sight of the magical flowers.

"Come!" said he, glowing, "we will toast the Hohenstaufens and the Hohenzollerns to-night, Richie."

Later, when I was revelling in fancies sweeter than the perfume of the roses, he pressed their stems reflectively, unbound them, and disclosed a slip of crested paper. On it was written :

" Violets are over."

Plain words ; but a princess had written them, and never did so golden a halo enclose any piece of human handiwork.

. . .

Though Prince Ernest had begun by asking for apologies, he did not obstinately demand them. The separation of Harry and Ottilia was not permanent. Besides, Richmond Roy, a subtle hunter, who knew all the ways of the field, kept upon the scent of the princely family. His victims, Ottilia and Harry, became an easy prey to his designs on account of their youth, their ingenuousness, the power of their mutual love. By an alternation of liberty and constraint, of meetings and partings, of intimate talks and silences, he governed them with a master hand, and disciplined them with such skill that they did not even rebel against their suffering. Princess Ottilia became little by little the only thought in Harry's life, the arbiter of his conduct. She provoked in him a desire for study. One day, near Ischl, in the Tyrol, Harry proposed another cruise. Ottilia replied :

" When I am well I study. Do not you ? "

" I have never studied in my life."

" Ah, lose no more time. The yacht is delicious idleness, but it is idleness."

This discreet reproof effected a sudden change. Harry settled himself not far from Hanover, in an old university town, so gloomy and preoccupied that the very buildings and pavements seemed to dispute upon some knotty problem in metaphysics or jurisprudence. The atmosphere of this town oppressed Richmond Roy. He solaced himself by organising great banquets for Harry's fellow-students. Then, when he wearied of this, he went away to Sarkeld, and there, with genius and irresistible eloquence, he discoursed to Prince Ernest upon a thousand industrial or financial schemes which would enrich him. For example, the Prince possessed upon his estates beds of coal undeveloped through want of capital. What more easy than to furnish His Royal Highness with the necessary funds? And Richard Roy sold Bank stock belonging to Harry. . . .

And this was not all: the Prince ought to become acquainted with the working of coal-mines. Then Richmond Roy took him to England where, during more than a month, he surprised and astounded him, uniting pleasure with business affairs, and visiting with him the immense mines which were the property of Mr. Beltham. On this occasion the Prince was astonished to learn that Harry Richmond would one day inherit such a vast mining district. His Highness declared that Harry needed but a little to be as brilliant a " parti " as any in Europe. He

conveyed his enthusiasm in a letter to his sister, the Margravine. The latter, as an outcome of the Prince's polite message, most graciously invited Harry to visit her.

. . .

Poor Margravine! She could not reconcile herself to the presence and the tedious arguments of Doctor Julius von Karsteg, a university bear whom the Princess Ottilia had made her Aristotle.

The learned professor was the worst-tempered man in Germany. Relying on the fame of his scholarship, his republican opinions, and his ascendancy over Princess Ottilia, he was not sparing of harsh words to any of the Margravine's guests who had the misfortune to displease him. One evening, after dinner, he took Harry Richmond into his study, and there, brusquely, amid the acrid vapours from his pipe, he said to him: "You are either a most fortunate or a most unfortunate young man!"

"You are fortunate if you have a solid and adventurous mind: most unfortunate if you are a mere sensational whipster.

"Aim your head at a star—your head!—and even if you miss it you don't fall. It's that light dancer, that gambler, the heart in you, my good young man, which aims itself at inaccessible heights, and has the fall—somewhat icy to reflect on! Give that organ full play and you may make sure of a handful of dust. Do you hear? It's a mind that wins a mind. That is why I warn you of being most unfortunate if you are a sensational whipster."

Harry Richmond had no need of this reproof to understand that he was playing a fool's part at Sarkeld. Was it not folly to pretend to the hand of a hereditary princess, when one is not only a commoner but also the son of a man of doubtful birth ? All the more so as the Princess, matured and instructed by the counsels of her tutor, seemed to grow more reserved. One day when she was on horseback, she had allowed her hand to hang listlessly by the side of her saddle, and Harry took the hand in his. Sighing deeply, but without seeking to remove it, she had murmured :

" No, not that, my friend ! " The quiet but firm command admitted of no reply, and Harry had nothing to do but release the little hand. . . .

In the meanwhile, Richmond Roy reappeared, more optimistic than ever, and bringing with him two magnificent pedigree hunters which he intended for the stables at Sarkeld. He had advanced to Prince Ernest, for the working of his coal-mines, a trifle of some thousands deducted from Harry's fortune. In the meantime his lawyers were busy procuring evidence that he was the son of a duke of royal blood. The struggle would soon be definitely ended—at Harry's expense be it understood—and Richmond Roy's birth would be recognised as legitimate. What ramblings ! What outbursts of enthusiasm ! . . . Harry listened to his eloquent outpourings unmoved. How little he shared his father's feelings !

Eager to enjoy once more the quiet of study, he buried himself in the old German university town. But an anonymous letter upset his plans : Princess Ottilia needed his help. Harry set out immediately for the Margravine's villa. What had happened ? Simply this, Princess Ottilia was to marry Prince Otto.

. . .

The laurels of Bella Vista shone radiant in the sun. A fiery haze crowned the tops of the pines. Harry Richmond galloped along the brow of a hill on this blinding afternoon. He caught sight of his rival, Prince Otto, crossing the lake in company with Princess Ottilia. And goaded by jealousy, his temples throbbing, he urged his horse towards the shore. Suddenly, when but half-way, Prince Otto emerged from between the branches of a group of chestnuts.

He was visibly out of humour. Alone, he was climbing on foot the slopes of the hill. He could not conceal his concern at the sight of the young Englishman, who with haggard eyes and flushed face resembled a man suffering from sunstroke. As the Prince regarded Harry's horse with admiration, the latter with great generosity offered him the hunter as a gift. The other hesitated, muttered some words, then finished by saying that he would willingly ride it as far as the castle to seek a little ice for Harry. Then he leaped into the saddle and disappeared.

Soon Harry had reached the side of the lake. The Princess, distraught and absent-minded, supported by the tree and with her eyes fixed upon the ground, did not hear him approach. She had just refused Prince Otto. . . . But hardly had she recognised Harry when her heart overflowed with a great delight. She smiled divinely. Losing control of her feelings through surprise and pleasure, she made no attempt to silence the furious young lover who assailed her with passionate words.

" You love me ? " she said.
" You have known it ! "
" Yes, yes ! "
" Forgiven me ? Speak, Princess."
" Call me by my name."
" My own soul ! Ottilia ! "

Ottilia could not dissemble. That very evening she told her father of her engagement to Harry Richmond.

Prince Ernest of Eppenwelzen demanded an interview with her lover ; and as one who is not free to give vent to his anger, he spoke haughtily, coldly but courteously : in his eyes the engagement did not exist.

At the close of the interview Harry received a challenge from Prince Otto, mad with rage at what he regarded as a slight and a trick. They fought with swords. Prince Otto was wounded in the arm and wished to continue the fight with pistols. The

seconds consented to this, and in his turn shortly afterwards Harry Richmond staggered, struck by a bullet. . . .

. . .

Princess Ottilia came to know of Harry's plight through an anonymous letter which was couched in such ambiguous terms as to make her fear that an assassination had been planned. She felt that duty called her immediately to Harry's bedside. Reckless of paternal anger, disdainful of scandal, she set out for the old university town.

With what surprise and grief did she learn that Harry was wounded in a duel! . . . A duel! . . . That barbarous custom was in her opinion characteristic of brainless savages. Had her beloved taken an example from "brutes armed with fangs and claws"? It was incredible. Her refusal to believe hurt Harry more than anything; especially as he reproached himself for having compromised her in the eyes of the public. He begged so earnestly that she would return to Sarkeld, that she dared not refuse him. Besides, his convalescence was already far advanced, and Princess Ottilia realised that she was quite useless in this student's lodging that Richmond Roy filled with the noise of his tirades.

. . .

Since this rash action was not noised abroad, Prince Ernest, with infinite common sense, decided to respect his daughter's independence. As for

Harry Richmond, the best way of getting rid of him seemed to be to admit him to the Court upon a slight acquaintanceship, and then to embarrass him by certain forms of etiquette, which would make him realise his irremediable inferiority, and the futility of his pursuit. . . .

Prince Ernest rigorously adopted this method. He received Harry Richmond cordially! He allowed him entrance to Court and palace! He even permitted him to dine seated between Princess Ottilia and the Margravine! But the moment a noble guest arrived in the person of Prince Hermann, Prince Ernest's cousin, Harry Richmond was directly relegated to his proper place. Fêtes were given, and fireworks were displayed in Sarkeld gay with flags. At Court, Prince Hermann danced several times with Princess Ottilia. Harry Richmond turned white with rage, but no one took notice of him, least of all Prince Hermann.

So little did he think of my presence, that returning from a ride one day, he seized and detained the Princess's hand. She frowned with pained surprise, but unresistingly, as became a young gentlewoman's dignity. Her hand was rudely caught and kept in the manner of a boisterous wooer—a Harry the Fifth or a lusty Petruchio. She pushed her horse on at a bound.

Prince Hermann did the same without releasing the Princess. Both soon disappeared from Harry's view, who remained behind, unable to endure the sight any longer.

Some minutes later, Prince Hermann returned towards the young Englishman, and in a princely tone said :

" Mr. Richmond, permit me to apologise to you. I have to congratulate you, it appears. I was not aware. —However, the Princess has done me the favour to enlighten me. How you will manage, I can't guess, but that is not my affair. I am a man of honour ; and, *on* my honour, I conceived that I was invited here to decide, as my habit is, on the spot, if I would, or if I would not. There ! I have been deceived—deceived myself, let's say. Very well. But enough said ; I thought I was in a clear field. We are used to having our way cleared for us, ' nous autres.' " The man's outrageously royal way of wooing, in contempt of minor presences and flimsy sentiment, made me jealous of him, notwithstanding his overthrow.

Full of resentment, with wounded heart, and wishing to be exposed no more to new insults, Harry unburdened himself to his father. The latter recommended him to end matters boldly : equivocations could not last for ever ; Harry must beg the favour of a meeting ; the Princess would solemnly plight her troth ; upon a given signal the Rev. Peterborough would present himself ; promises and rings once exchanged, Harry would set sail fearlessly for England. . . .

Such was Richmond Roy's plan. Harry adopted it without murmur. He acquainted the Princess that he would expect her in the palace library ; then

he dined merrily with Prince Ernest, announcing that he should leave on the morrow for Riversley.

. . .

The first things noticed in the library—a long, low and sombre room, voluminously and richly hung with draperies—were rows of classical books, and bronze busts of some philosophers. A second glance revealed, at the farthest end of the room, a sofa, upon which were piled yellow-covered volumes, French novels, the Prince's light reading.

A valet drew the venetian shutters and the curtains, placed lamps upon the writing-desk and upon the mantel-shelf, then left. Harry was alone.

Towards midnight he rose, hearing the rustle of a silken robe in the corridor. And the Princess appeared.

Standing with a silver lamp raised in her right hand to the level of her head, as if she expected to meet obscurity. A thin blue Indian scarf muffled her throat and shoulders. Her hair was loosely knotted. The lamp's full glow illumined and shadowed her. She was like a statue of Twilight.

One of the volumes upon the sofa fell to the floor, and the Princess shuddered; but she soon smiled at her childish alarm.

She was restless, strongly moved, but otherwise calm. She did not hide from Harry that she had come solely to please him:

"Be comforted," she said; "it is your right to bid me come, if you think fit."

I told her that it was my intention to start for England in the morning; that this was the only moment I had, and would be the last interview: my rights, if I possessed any, and I was not aware that I did, I threw down.

"You throw down one end of the chain," she said.

"In the name of heaven, then," cried I, "release yourself."

She shook her head. "That is not my meaning."

The conversation languished: Ottilia felt herself bound by invisible coils; and Harry, ashamed of any dishonesty, had, however, too much pride, too much "amour-propre" to utter the first tender and spontaneous words which would have comforted the Princess. At last, by a happy thought, he said that they would soon be separated, and that he desired a gift: the Princess's glove.

She made her hand bare and gave me, not the glove, but the hand.

"Ah! but this I cannot keep."

"Will you have everything spoken?" she said, in a tone that would have been reproachful had not tenderness melted it. "There should be a spirit between us, Harry, to spare the task. You do keep it, if you choose. I have some little dread of being taken for a madwoman, and more—an actual horror of behaving ungratefully to my generous father. He has proved that he can be indulgent, most trusting and considerate for his daughter, though he is a prince; my duty is to show him that I do not forget I am a princess. I owe my

rank allegiance when he forgets his on my behalf, my friend! You are young. None but an inexperienced girl hoodwinked by her tricks of intuition, would have dreamed you superior to the passions of other men. I was blind; I am regretful—take my word as you do my hand—for no one's sake but my father's. You and I are bound fast; only, help me that the blow may be lighter for him; if I descend from the place I was born to, let me tell him it is to occupy one I am fitted for, or should not at least feel my Family's deep blush in filling. . . ."

I pressed my lips to her hand.

In our silence another of the fatal yellow volumes thumped the floor.

She looked into my eyes and asked:

"Have we been speaking before a witness?"

So thoroughly had she renovated me, that I accused and reproved the lurking suspicion with a soft laugh.

"Beloved! I wish we had been."

"If it might be," she said, divining me and musing.

"Why not?"

She stared.

"How? What do you ask?"

The look on my face alarmed her. I was breathless and colourless, with the heart of a hawk eyeing his bird—a fox, would be the truer comparison, but the bird was noble, not one that cowered. Her beauty and courage lifted me into high air, in spite of myself, and it was a huge weight of greed that fell away from me when I said:

"I would not urge it for an instant. Consider—if you had just plighted your hand in mine before a witness!"

"My hand is in yours; my word to you is enough."

"Enough. My thanks to heaven for it! But consider—a pledge of fidelity that should be my secret

angel about me in trouble and trial; my wedded soul! She cannot falter, she is mine for ever, she guides me, holds me to work, inspirits me!—she is secure from temptation, from threats, from everything—nothing can touch, nothing move her, she is mine! I mean, an attested word, a form, that is—a betrothal. For me to say—my beloved and my betrothed! You hear that? Beloved! is a lonely word:—betrothed! carries us joined up to death. Would you?—I do but ask to know that you would. To-morrow I am loose in the world, and there's a darkness in the thought of it almost too terrible. Would you?—one sworn word that gives me my bride, let men do what they may! I go then singing to battle—sure!—Remember, it is but the question whether you would."

"Harry, I would, and will," she said, her lips shuddering—"wait"—for a cry of joy escaped me—"I will—look you me in the eyes and tell me you have a doubt of me."

I looked: she swam in a mist.

Urged on by the warmth and recklessness of his passion, Harry declared that he never doubted her, and that he renounced all pledges.

To be clear in my own sight as well as in hers, I made mention of the half-formed conspiracy to obtain her plighted troth in a binding manner. It was not necessary for me to excuse myself; she did that, saying, "Could there be a greater proof of my darling's unhappiness? I am to blame."

As she was about to leave, the Princess asked Harry if his father was still up, or if he had gone to bed.

. . .

"I will see him. I have treated you ill. I have exacted too much patience. The suspicion was owing to a warning I had this evening, Harry; a silly warning to beware of snares; and I had no fear of them, believe me, though for some moments, and without the slightest real desire to be guarded, I fancied Harry's father was overhearing me. He is your father, dearest: fetch him to me. My father will hear of this from my lips—why not he? Ah! did I suspect you ever so little? I will atone for it; not atone, I will make it my pleasure; it is my pride that has hurt you both. O my lover! my lover! Dear head, dear eyes! Delicate and noble that you are! my own stronger soul! Where was my heart? Is it sometimes dead, or sleeping? But you can touch it to life. Look at me—I am yours. I consent, I desire it; I will see him. I *will* be bound. The heavier the chains, oh! the better for me. What am I, to be proud of anything not yours, Harry? and I that have passed over to you! I will see him at once."

A third in the room cried out:

"No, not that—you do not!"

The tongue was German and struck on us like a roll of unfriendly musketry before we perceived the enemy. "Princess Ottilia! you remember your dignity or I defend you and it, think of me what you will!"

Baroness Turckems, desperately entangled by the sofa-covering, rushed into the ray of the lamps and laid her hand on the bell-rope. In a minute we had an alarm sounding, my father was among us, there was a mad play of chatter, and we stood in the strangest nightmare-light that ever ended an interview of lovers.

The room was in flames, Baroness Turckems plucking at the bell-rope, my father looking big and brilliant.

"Hold hand!" he shouted to the frenzied Baroness.

She counter-shouted; both of them stamped feet; the portico sentinel struck the butt of his musket on the

hall-doors; bell answered bell along the upper galleries.

"Foolish woman, be silent!" cried my father.

"Incendiary!" she half-shrieked.

He turned to the Princess, begging her to retire, but she stared at him, and I too, after having seen him deliberately apply the flame of her lamp to the curtains, deemed him mad. He was perfectly self-possessed, and said, "This will explain the bell!" and fetched a deep breath, and again urged the Princess to retire.

Peterborough was the only one present who bethought him of doing fireman's duty. The risk looked greater than it was. He had but to tear the lighted curtains down and trample on them. Suddenly the Baroness called out, "The man is right! Come with me, Princess; escape, your Highness, escape! And you," she addressed me—"*you* rang the bell, you!"

"To repair your error, Baroness," said my father.

"I have my conscience pure; have you?" she retorted.

He bowed and said, "The fire will also excuse your presence on the spot, Baroness."

"I thank my God I am not so cool as you," said she.

"Your warmth"—he bent to her—"shall always be your apology, Baroness."

Seeing the curtains extinguished, Ottilia withdrew. She gave me no glance.

All this occurred before the night-porter, who was going his rounds, could reach the library. Lacqueys and maids were soon at his heels. My father met Prince Ernest with a florid story of a reckless student, either asleep or too anxious to secure a particular volume, and showed his usual consideration by not asking me to verify the narrative. With that, and with high praise of Peterborough, as to whose gallantry I heard him deliver a very circumstantial account, he, I suppose, satisfied

the Prince's curiosity, and appeased him, the damage being small compared with the uproar. Prince Ernest questioned two or three times, "What set him ringing so furiously?" My father made some reply.

. . .

Harry Richmond received neither violets nor roses upon his departure; in vain he turned towards the windows to catch a glimpse of Ottilia: he only saw the misty panes.

However, Richmond Roy was in high glee, as was his custom when he played an important part. It is true that he had rendered a service to the Princess when he extinguished the burning curtains; for Ottilia was not the girl to run away for a menace, and the constant ringing of the Baroness had not intimidated her, and there was nothing less than a fire needed to justify the Princess's presence at that hour in the library.

But I felt humiliated on Ottilia's behalf, and enraged on my own. And I had, I must confess, a touch of fear of a man who could unhesitatingly go to extremities, as he had done, by summoning fire to the rescue. He assured me that moments such as those inspired him, and were the pride of his life, and he was convinced that, upon reflection, "I should rise to his pitch." He deluded himself with the idea of his having foiled Baroness Turckems, nor did I choose to contest it, though it struck me that she was too conclusively the foiler. . . . And I had not the best of consciences—I felt my hand would be spell-bound in the attempt to write to the Princess, and with that sense of incapacity I seemed to be cut loose from her, drifting back into the desolate days

before I saw her wheeled in her invalid chair along the sands and my life knew sunrise.

. . .

Harry's forebodings were realised; he never summoned up courage to write to Princess Ottilia; the pen fell from his hand when he remembered the tragi-comic conclusion of their last interview.

Why, therefore, did he not abandon this chimerical project of marrying a hereditary princess? Perhaps the secret lay in his double nature: his mother's and father's blood were part of him without mingling. The one part, so much of a Beltham, that he loved the beautiful estate of Riversley, where one could be truly one's self, having no rôle to play, and breathing an atmosphere neither too unreal nor subtle. The other part, so much of a Richmond, that he disdained the rustic and rural life which they all led at his grandfather's. . . . Harry knew not for what he wished, because he was unwilling to renounce anything. He desired at the same time the principality of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld and the mansion of Riversley. Such are the contradictions of a young sentimentalist.

In short, his painful experiences in Germany had not yet opened his eyes. Although glad to find in Janet Ilchester an excellent comrade, gay, frank and cordial, his feeling never went beyond friendship.

She did not raise a spark of poetical sentiment in my bosom. She had grown a tall young woman, firmly

built, light of motion, graceful perhaps ; but it was not the grace of grace : the grace of simplicity, rather. . . Upon what could she possibly reflect ? She had not a care, she had no education, she could hardly boast an idea—two at a time I was sure she had never entertained. The sort of wife for a fox-hunting lord, I summed up, and hoped he would be a good fellow.

He did not suspect for one moment that this young girl had a heart, and that this heart, beating only for Mr. Beltham and himself, had some claim for consideration. He unscrupulously thrust upon her the most thankless tasks.

It was Janet who was to announce to the squire the news of Harry's engagement to Princess Ottilia ; it was Janet who was to appease the touchy old man, who did not wish to see a foreigner in his house, nor any German grandchildren. Janet so far sacrificed herself as to imply that she had refused her cousin, because she preferred Heriot or Temple.

Another service which Janet rendered at that time was the hiding of the papers when they referred to the doings of the " very celebrated Mr. Richmond Roy." She carried the papers to Mr. Beltham and prevented him from reading them by alleging that they reeked with anti-Tory leaders. The squire was smilingly obedient. But Harry was in a state of fear when he learned that his grandfather's name, his own and Princess Ottilia's were frequently mentioned in the papers, which con-

tained Richmond Roy's intrigues at the Court of Sarkeld as the most recent and most fruitful exploit of this adventurer, who, after having beguiled the heiress of Riversley, had endeavoured to obtain for his son a wife of royal blood.

The squire would have immediately broken off the engagement between Princess Ottilia and Harry, if he had known that she had been tricked, as had his daughter Marian. But he did not know that Richmond Roy had taken part in the tour, and continued to believe that the Rev. Peterborough had been Harry's only companion during these two years of study. His grandson allowed him to keep to this error, not daring to tell him the truth.

One day, at the table, the Rev. Peterborough declared that in Germany he was less of a tutor to Harry than of a private chaplain. . . . And the squire still smiled at this candid avowal, when Janet broke out in astonishment :

"Oh, now I understand! It was his father! Harry proclaiming his private chaplain!"

The squire's face reddened. Divining a plot, he turned a terrible look upon his grandson, and was silent. After the meal, he shut himself up with Peterborough, upon whom he heaped reproaches and insults ; and while tormenting his victim he drew from him the real state of affairs upon the voyage. At the end of the interview Harry was asked to

render an account of his expenses—" Why not ? " replied the young man in a defiant tone. And he wrote to his bankers demanding his bank-book without delay.

Really Harry did not know himself how his banking account stood. He had entrusted his father with a cheque-book, and Richmond Roy drew from his son's deposit account as he wished. It was in this manner that the guests of the Prince of Eppenwelzen had paid their bills.

Upon opening the bank-book the squire experienced a suffocating sensation. What he saw was enormous, monstrous ; and Harry shared the feeling with him when he looked at the book.

Since our arrival in England, my father had drawn nine thousand pounds. The sums expended during our absence on the Continent reached the perplexing figures of forty-eight thousand. I knew it too likely, besides, that all debts were not paid. Self—self—self drew for thousands at a time ; sometimes, as the squire's convulsive forefinger indicated, for many thousands within a week.

Harry Richmond was ruined. Of his material fortune but very little remained. And the squire, thinking over the wanton waste, paled pitifully. He shook himself from the state of stupor to curse furiously his grandson's folly, and the roguery of Richmond Roy. His wild complaints, his imprecations and anathemas, rose to a paroxysm worthy of an ancient Hebrew prophet ; and as he launched

out into a flow of words, there is no knowing to what lengths he would have gone if Janet, Miss Dorothy and Captain Bulsted, a neighbour who had married the beautiful Julia, daughter of Rippenger the schoolmaster, had not interposed.

The squire realised grumblingly that it was not right to vent his anger upon an inexperienced lad. Better, decidedly, to interrogate the guilty one. But receive at Riversley that hateful, poisonous creature! Never! He would meet him at Captain Bulsted's house.

. . .

The two irreconcilable enemies had not crossed swords since that far-off night when Richmond Roy came to take his son away from Riversley. And the squire, upon the approach of another struggle, experienced an almost uncontrollable repugnance and anger.

It was in the neighbourhood of Bulsted that the meeting took place. Richmond Roy and his son were seated in a carriage, while Mr. Beltham was on horseback. From afar Richmond Roy had seen his father-in-law, and rising, stood bare-headed in the carriage; while the squire, ill at ease, crushed his hat down upon his head.

"Mr. Beltham, I trust I see you well."

"Better, sir, when I've got rid of a damned unpleasant bit o' business."

"I offer you my hearty assistance."

"Do you? Then step down and come into my bailiff's."

"I come, sir."

My father alighted from the carriage. The squire cast his gouty leg to be quit of his horse, but not in time to check my father's advances and ejaculations of condolence.

"Gout, Mr. Beltham, is a little too much a proof to *us* of a long line of ancestry."

His hand and arm were raised in the form of a splint to support the squire, who glared back over his cheek-bone, horrified that he could not escape the contact, and in too great pain from arthritic throes to protest.

Happily, Harry ran to his grandfather's aid. And Mr. Beltham and Richmond Roy entered the cottage together.

A sardonic smile was seen on the squire's face when he came out again after the conference. But Richmond Roy did not appear out of countenance. Far from it; he had deeply deplored the enormous expense, but begged the squire to estimate the value of a royal princess. Ought not Harry to hold his place worthily at the Court of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld? Was it not necessary to grant extraordinary sums to defray the expenses of being thus represented? For the remainder Richmond Roy had only drawn out the sums disputed in order to make greater increase. The joint expenses of father and son were but a particle of the fortune. As for that mass of money invested in several industrial and mining enterprises, which would bring in far more than the small English rentals or

consols, that was safe enough. Besides, the capital still existed; and if they would accord him but a reasonable delay, sufficient time to realise the money without too many risks, Richmond Roy would undertake upon his honour to restore the money to his son.

The squire fixed a limit of two months only.

. . .

One would think that Richmond Roy, in such a critical position, would have devised some way of obtaining the money. But, having no notion of danger, difficulty stimulated him like an intoxicant. At this period his pomp and splendour reached their zenith. This was truly the apogee of his extraordinary career. He dazzled the highest society of London by his display, satiated as it was by luxury. The most renowned and most eccentric lords of the realm dared not rival in munificence this insensate genius who revelled in the most dazzling displays. He gave three sumptuous balls, to which he invited all that London could supply in the way of persons distinguished either by merit or by birth. He indulged in the rarest and most costly caprices; he dreamed of setting the fashion in sedan-chairs, and ordered two dozen of them for himself and friends. And, despite the scandal, he displayed a charm, a gift to please, and an irresistible skill in eloquence; so that certain embassies, and even some of the most exclusive houses of the aristocracy, opened their doors to him.

Wherever he appeared, his presence excited such lively comment, that the journals printed each day some remark upon the coming marriage between Mr. Harry Richmond and Princess Ottilia of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld. On the other hand, the judicial world was in a tumult. Richmond Roy's lawyers, Dettermain and Newson, were striving hard to prove that their client's mother, the beautiful Anastasia Dewsbury, had secretly married a prince of royal blood. They produced, in support of their evidence, musty certificates, testimonials, discoloured portraits, and love-letters in faded ink and on paper yellow with age. If Richmond Roy could establish his case, would he be recognised as a member of a reigning dynasty? This problem formed the chief topic of the day. Bets were made upon his chances. The frequenters of clubs spoke of nothing else.

The young Marquis of Edbury invented a plan for making Richmond Roy dine with another pretender, a big fat City merchant, half-insane, who, declaring that he was of Bourbon origin, maintained that he was Louis XVII escaped from Temple prison. An infinite number of tales were reported about the meeting of these two half-witted monomaniacs. They asserted that the self-styled Louis XVII, who by the way was heated with wine, had exhibited before the company certain marks, altogether conclusive proofs of his origin, and defied Richmond Roy to do as much. The latter, with that

irony which always won him the sympathy of scoffers, had replied :

" Certainly, sir, it is an admirable and roomy site, but as I am not your enemy, I doubt if I shall often have the opportunity to behold it ! "

Richmond Roy at this time lived in a magnificent hotel, very near that to which he had brought Harry after his stay at Dipwell. Assisted by his valet Tollingly, and the faithful Mrs. Waddy, he received his secretaries, treasurers, tailors, perfumers, jesters and parasites ; he conferred with journalists, distributed help to the poor, and organised at last what he called his grand parade ; and naturally cast to the winds all the money he had borrowed. " What a whirlwind ! " groaned Mrs. Waddy. To crown all, Richmond Roy could not tolerate questionings. Every economical scheme angered him as though it were cowardice. He said :

" I have heard of men who lost heart at the eleventh hour, and if they had only hung on, with gallant faith in themselves, they would have been justified by the result. Faith works miracles. At least it allows time for them."

And at another time, when Harry paid his father's creditors, he said :

" I detest the disturbance that you make about my debts ! "

And yet this mad-cap sometimes gave good counsel. . . . It was he who urged his son to offer

himself as Liberal candidate for Chippenden at the forthcoming election. It was due to the devoted co-operation of his father that Harry was elected. . . . We really saw then of what Richmond Roy was capable. He placed at his son's service all his personal gifts, his versatility, his resource, his zeal, his inexhaustible vigour and his power of suggestion ; he heaped ridicule upon his son's antagonists ; he bewitched the electors and their wives, so that Harry was chosen by a large majority. And Richmond Roy, triumphant from this victory, persuaded himself that Harry was henceforth Princess Ottilia's equal.

At last, as if the gods had granted protection to the most culpable prodigality, at the moment even when Richmond Roy's creditors had lost patience with him, and wished to put him in prison, a theatrical effect was produced ; for a messenger, carrying miraculous news, had been to his house. And they learned that Dettermain and Newson had received from an unknown source the sum of twenty-five thousand pounds to be placed at the disposition of their client, Mr. Richmond Roy. No condition encumbered the providential gift ; no note explained it. The anonymous donor simply expressed a desire that henceforth Mr. Richmond Roy would abandon all action against the State.

Never was a stipulation more useless. Without feeling too elated upon his extraordinary luck,

Richmond Roy pocketed the money, and credited his son with the amount agreed upon. After which, having acquainted the squire, he gave himself no trouble about finding his benefactor, because this opportune subsidy and the half-yearly annuity which he had received had to his mind an identical origin. In other words, this is what he believed: the Government, intimidated by Richmond Roy's pertinacity, were showing signs of yielding, and were endeavouring to bribe him. This amount of money was tantamount to a tacit acknowledgment of his claims. But what did it matter! Richmond Roy, certain of success, refused to beat a retreat. . . .

Was this assumption true? Harry could not grasp it. He succeeded, however, in discovering the person who had acted as intermediary for the unknown donor: he was a lawyer, Mr. Bannerbridge, the same gentleman who had formerly rescued the little Harry Richmond from the streets of London. Unhappily, when Harry presented himself at the lawyer's house, he found that Mr. Bannerbridge had just died, and no one could inform him concerning the money. . . .

In the meanwhile the squire demanded Harry's presence at Riversley. The old man declared himself satisfied, since the twenty-five thousand pounds had been paid within the allotted time; nevertheless, he begged Harry to consult with him before making any other decision. The young man

obeyed his grandfather's summons; but instead of alighting at Riversley, and going direct to the Grange, he had a great desire to see his old schoolfellow Heriot, who lived at Durstan, not far from Riversley. Harry remained some considerable time with his excellent friend, and only left Durstan at nightfall.

A refreshing wind blew across the heath. Harry preferred to go on foot over the moor which separates Durstan from Riversley. Suddenly four men rushed upon him, whom he recognised as gipsies; they attacked him with blows of fists and bludgeons, and left him upon the ground for dead.

These vagabonds were seeking a personal vengeance. Deceived by the darkness of the night, they had taken Harry Richmond for their enemy. When they had found out their error, they returned to their victim, raised him with care, and entrusted him to the women of their tribe. The latter, by their attentions, restored him to life, and kept him in their tent for several weeks.

As soon as he had sufficiently recovered, Harry Richmond informed his father of his whereabouts, rather than the squire, or Captain Bulsted, who would have taken steps against the gipsies. So Richmond Roy came alone to the tent where lay his son. Realising how weak he was, but that he was cured of his wounds, he took him to the seaside in the hope that the air from the Channel would hasten his convalescence.

Princess Ottilia at that time received a painful and heartrending letter, a letter from a father in distress who wept for his stricken son. It was one of those pressing and passionate appeals which seem to come from the heart, and which awake an echo in the least sensitive soul. The tender and faithful Princess was deeply moved. She was alone, separated from Baroness Turckems. Her father was staying in Paris. Her aunt, the Margravine, had been summoned to the seignory of Rippau. Besides, her very dear governess, formerly Miss Sibley, who had become the wife of a Herr von Dittmarsch, confirmed the bad news she had received about Harry. How could the Princess suspect a new trap? She hesitated no more than after the duel between Harry and Prince Otto. She left in company with Frau von Dittmarsch, and, as if by chance, the first person to salute her upon the landing-stage at the Isle of Wight was Harry Richmond, certainly pale and thin, but quite alive. . . . It seemed to the Princess that a trap-door was drawn from under her. . . .

Thus begins the last part of the romance, more stormy and nerve-racking than the last act of a tragedy. Almost all the personages, our old friends from Riversley, London, and Sarkeld, come together in the little port of the Isle of Wight, and join in an astonishing and picturesque imbroglio, like that which sometimes terminates Shakespeare's comedies.

And there once more we meet the chief figures of the drama, pell-mell, crowded together upon a small stage lighted by the sinister glare of Richmond Roy: old Squire Beltham, Janet Ilchester and Miss Dorothy, all alarmed by Harry's mysterious accident; Prince Ernest arrived in haste from Paris; Prince Hermann specially despatched by the Margravine to save the situation; and in addition to these principal actors useful supernumeraries such as Temple and the Goodwins. All these varied beings swarm together and beat about as birds taken in the net of an implacable hunter. These magnificent chapters seem to celebrate the glory of Richmond Roy, the natural son of an actress and of a prince of royal blood; a magician and master-mountebank. . . .

Mountebank! This word is not the one with which to startle so clever a man, proud in having at his mercy the Prince of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld. . . . Harry storms in vain against the ignoble trick which has made him unworthy of Princess Ottilia and lost him her love. Richmond Roy, smiling with a superior air, will not listen to the young man, declaring that in spite of all he will make him happy, that it is already too late to withdraw. What could be more evident? Prince Ernest realises that he is powerless. Upon the first sign of revolt, Richmond Roy would let loose against him all the tongues of the Press, that Press so greedy for scandal and already so knowingly primed: the

honour of the House of Eppenwelzen and the young Princess's reputation would suffer much more than by an alliance with Harry Richmond, heir to a prodigious fortune, member of the House of Commons, and soon, without doubt, to be connected with the royal family of England. Not being able to effect an honourable retreat His Royal Highness accepts the situation. He capitulates, and consents to the marriage between Harry and Ottilia. . . .

Alas! of what avail are Harry's entreaties and invectives! And what does it matter though Janet Ilchester, having taken the Princess under her protection, scolds her, rebukes her, almost keeps her imprisoned and prevents her from seeing Harry in public, or even from receiving him! What does it matter though Prince Hermann, angry and full of pride, turns his back upon Richmond Roy! . . . Weak threats and vain boasts! . . . Richmond Roy is not to be so easily appalled, and laughs at these childish efforts of resistance. So much worse for these pigmies if they have come to cast themselves into his snares! Now that he has a hold upon them he intends to keep them. The hour of his triumph has sounded. It is necessary that the whole affair should be magnificent and memorable. In order that a day in the history of the English nation should be signalised, and that it should serve as a lesson to sovereigns and their people.

Thus, when the squire demands an interview of

him, Richmond Roy has no intention of making his escape. He visits the proud old man. He boasts of having kept his promise, despite the misery and persecutions he has suffered, since that winter's night when, driven from Riversley, he was obliged to bear away Harry in his arms. Let the squire go and demand the Princess's hand from Prince Ernest! The affair is already well advanced, and Mr. Beltham has nothing more to do than to endow his grandchildren with a suitable sum.

Let us follow Richmond Roy and his son! Following them into the unpretentious hotel where they are to join Mr. Beltham, Janet Ilchester and Miss Dorothy, we will take part in that which Meredith himself calls:

"The scene in the fullest of their blood and brain under stress of a fiery situation." [1]

. . .

What are the squire's schemes? Why is he so strangely interested in the furnishing of twenty-five thousand pounds which were mysteriously handed over by the solicitors Dettermain and Newson? Richmond Roy, as amazed as ourselves by this piece of retrospective curiosity, avows that he is totally ignorant of the donor; that he presumes the subsidy was furnished by the Government; and that he is of this opinion, because the intermediary of the anonymous person was no other than a

[1] See the letter of the 22nd of July, 1887, cited in Chapter IV.

certain Mr. Bannerbridge, exceedingly well known in official circles. . . .

How troubled is Miss Dorothy! How pale and agitated! More than anyone she seems to suffer during this cruel discussion. She wishes to leave, to take Janet out under the pretext of making some purchases in the town; but the squire forbids it; it is no longer a father, it is an examining magistrate, bitter, severe, suspicious, hardly impartial, who questions her. . . . Yes or no; has she known this Mr. Bannerbridge? . . .

She faltered: "I knew him. . . . Harry was lost in the streets of London when he was a little fellow, and the Mr. Bannerbridge I knew found him and took him to his house, and was very kind to him."

"What was his Christian name?"

I gave them: "Charles Adolphus."

"The identical person!" exclaimed my father.

"Oh! you admit it," said the squire. "Ever seen him since the time Harry was lost, Dorothy?"

"Yes," she answered, "I have heard he is dead."

"Did you see him shortly before his death?"

"I happened to see him a short time before."

"He was your man of business, was he?"

"For such little business as I had to do."

"You were sure you could trust him, eh?"

"Yes."

My Aunt Dorothy breathed deeply.

"By God, ma'am, you're a truthful woman!"

The old man gave her a glare of admiration.

But Richmond Roy is not here to waste time in so frivolous an inquiry.

He rises to his feet impatiently and declares :

" I can conduct my son to happiness and greatness, my dear sir ; but to some extent I require your grandfatherly assistance ; and I urge you now to present your respects to the Prince and Princess, and judge yourself of his Highness's disposition for the match. I assure you in advance that he welcomes the proposal."

The squire hangs back. So irksome and grave a proceeding with a prince, a foreigner and an unknown—and that which makes it still more painful, the idea of failure—is repugnant to him. But in vain he foams and stamps with rage ; everyone is against him ; even the two ladies present, who are in league with Richmond Roy, demand an official marriage.

At this juncture a domestic enters, carrying Prince Hermann's card.

" Another prince ! " cried the squire. " These Germans seem to grow princes like potatoes—dozens to a root ! Who's the card for ? Ask him to walk up. Show him into a quiet room. Does he speak English ? "

Upon learning that this prince speaks English as well as Janet, the squire is mollified, and consents to negotiate with him upon the question of his grandson's marriage.

As the squire leaves the room leaning upon Janet's arm, Miss Dorothy makes for the window where Harry is standing, and whispers in his ear :

"The money has not been spent? Has it? Has any part of it been spent? Are you sure you have more than three parts of it?"

And adds:

"Tell me, Harry, that the money is all safe; nearly all; it is important to know; you promised economy."

Really, though Miss Dorothy was considered at Riversley as an old maid, extremely careful, and even inclined to parsimony, Harry is astonished that under these conditions she should be so concerned about money which really did not belong to her. His aunt's insistence strikes him as somewhat humorous, and he is on the verge of laughter. But, realising that his destiny is being decided in another room, he remains grave.

. . .

The squire, when he enters the drawing-room with Janet, resumes the affair of Miss Dorothy. He also summons his grandson. What remains of the money handed over to Richmond Roy? Has he already spent it?

"Not all, sir," I was able to say.
"Half?"
"Yes, I think so."
"Three parts?"
"It may be."
"And liabilities besides?"
"There are some."
"You're not a liar. That'll do for you."

Miss Dorothy, livid in colour, with her lips pressed together, and bending like a shrub before a squall, shuts her eyes tightly. Alas! she understands only too well the loud and vengeful voice which publicly accuses her of a clumsy strategy. Mr. Beltham hates spying: to have recourse to secret police, to eavesdrop upon one's own family, are detestable practices. But when the truth is forced upon him, when the evidence leaps up before his eyes, must a father turn aside and pretend not to see anything? The squire, suspecting nothing, had come to London on business. There, by chance, while at his banker's, they had opened the account-book in his presence at the page "Beltham," and he saw and understood all. Henceforth it is an assumed fact: Miss Dorothy had sold twenty-five thousand pounds' worth of stock. . . .

Miss Beltham trembles.

And Richmond Roy, how does he receive this revelation? . . . A strange thing, he does not seem to have heard! . . . Convinced that the twenty-five thousand pounds came to him from the Government, and long ago accustomed to the squire's violent outbursts, he has scarcely listened to these latest scenes: he keeps his bold air, remaining impassive and slightly sarcastic, so that the squire, exasperated by this arrogant attitude, turns against him all the fury of his anger:

"Richmond, there, my daughter, Dorothy Beltham, there's the last of your fools and dupes. She's a truthful

woman, I'll own, and she'll contradict me if what I say is not the fact. That twenty-five thousand from 'Government' came out of her estate."

"Out of——"

"Out of—be damned, sir! She's the person who paid it."

"If the 'damns' have set up, you may as well let the ladies go," said I.

He snapped at me like a rabid dog in career.

"She's the person—one of your petticoat 'Government'—who paid—do you hear me, Richmond?—the money to help you to keep your word: to help you to give your balls and dinners too. She—I won't say she told you, and you knew it—she paid it. She sent it through her Mr. Bannerbridge. Do you understand now? *You* had it from *her*. My God! look at the fellow!"

A dreadful gape of stupefaction had usurped the smiles on my father's countenance; his eyes rolled over, he tried to articulate, and was indeed a spectacle for an enemy. His convulsed frame rocked the syllables, as with a groan, unpleasant to hear, he called on my Aunt Dorothy by successive stammering apostrophes to explain, spreading his hands wide. He called out her Christian name. Her face was bloodless.

My father touched the points of his fingers on his forehead, straining to think, too theatrically, but in hard earnest, I believe. He seemed to be rising on tiptoe.

"Oh, madam! Dear lady! my friend! Dorothy, my sister! Better a thousand times that I had married, though I shrank from a heartless union! This money—it is not——"

Even as the spectators are angered when an executioner tortures his victim beyond measure, Harry, Miss Dorothy and Janet try to prevent the squire

from further torturing Richmond Roy. But how is one to stay the cyclone? Mr. Beltham is beside himself with fury: he rails against the presumptuous rogue who boasted of intimidating the British Government, and then lived for years at the expense of a provincial spinster. . . . Yes, for three long years, for the annuity itself, the famous annuity of the "Government," was but Dorothy Beltham's pension handed over to Richmond Roy by the agency of Mr. Bannerbridge.

"You married the boy's mother to craze and kill her, and guttle her property. You waited for the boy to come of age to swallow what was settled on him. You wait for me to lie in my coffin to pounce on the strong-box you think me the fool to toss to a young donkey ready to ruin all his belongings for you! For nine-and-twenty years you've sucked the veins of my family, and struck through my house like a rotting-disease. Nine-and-twenty years ago you gave a singing-lesson in my house: the pest has been in it ever since! You breed vermin in the brain, to think of you! Your wife, your son, your dupes, every soul that touches you, mildews from a blight! You were born of ropery, and you go at it straight, like a webfoot to water. What's your boast? —your mother's disgrace! You shame your mother. Your whole life's a ballad o' bastardy. You cry up the woman's infamy to hook at a father. You swell and strut on her pickings. You're a cock forced from the smoke of the dunghill! You shame your mother, damned adventurer! You train your boy for a swindler after your own pattern; your twirl him in your curst harle-quinade to a damnation as sure as your own. The day you crossed my threshold the devils danced on their

flooring. I've never seen the sun shine fair on me after it. With your guitar under the windows, of moonlight nights: your Spanish fopperies and trickeries! your French phrases and toeings! I was touched by a leper. You set your traps for both my girls: you caught the brown one first, did you, and flung her second for t'other, and drove a tandem of 'em to live the spangled hog you are; and down went the mother of the boy to the place she liked better, and my other girl here—the one you cheated for her salvation—you tried to cajole her from home and me, to send her the same way down. She stuck to decency. Good Lord! you threatened to hang yourself, guitar and all. But her purse served your turn. For why? You're a leech. I speak before ladies or I'd rip your town-life to shreds. Your cause! your romantic history! your fine figure! every inch of you's notched with villainy! You fasten on every moneyed woman that comes in your way. You've outdone Herod in murdering the innocents, for he didn't feed on 'em, and they've made you fat. One thing I'll say of you: you look the beastly thing you set yourself up for. The kindest blow to you's to call you impostor."

My Aunt Dorothy supplicated his attention. "One error I must correct." Her voice issued from a contracted throat, and was painfully thin and straining, as though the will to speak did violence to her weaker nature. "My sister loved Mr. Richmond. It was to save her life, because I believed she loved him much and would have died, that Mr. Richmond—in pity—offered her his hand, at my wish": she bent her head: "at my cost. It was done for me. I wished it; he obeyed me. No blame—" her dear mouth faltered. "I am to be accused, if anybody."

Tender and faithful Dorothy! You have expressed in this avowal all the modesty, gentleness,

ingenuousness, and timidity of your soul. While you painfully articulate this public confession, all hearts are thrilled, and the squire himself would have embraced you with admiration, if his excessive anger had not stupefied him, and if he had not still kept to his purpose of crushing his opponent, as if to punish him for inspiring such a noble devotion.

The only hope that remains to Richmond Roy, amidst the bankruptcy of his wild dreams, is the marriage of his son to Princess Ottilia. Thus he begs the squire not to bear the same animosity towards his son as towards him. Provided that the marriage should take place, he would consent to disappear, and no one should ever hear of him again.

Then Mr. Beltham gives him the final blow:

"Richmond, your last little bit of villainy's broken in the egg. I separate the boy from you: he's not your accomplice there, I'm glad to know. You witched the lady over to pounce on her like a fowler, you threatened her father with a scandal, if he thought proper to force the trap; swore you'd toss her to be plucked by the gossips, eh? She's free of you! She—what is it, Janet? Never mind, I've got the story—she didn't want to marry; but this prince, who called on me just now, happened to be her father's nominee, and he heard of your scoundrelism, and he behaved like a man and a gentleman, and offered himself, none too early nor too late, as it turns out; and the princess, like a good girl, has made amends to her father by accepting him. They sent him here to stop any misunderstanding. He speaks good English, so that's certain. Your lies will be contradicted, every one of 'em, seriatim, in to-morrow's

newspapers, setting the real man in place of the wrong one; and you'll draw no profit from them in your fashionable world, where you've been grinning lately, like a blackamoor's head on a conjurer's plate—the devil alone able to account for the body and joinings. Now you can be off."

Harry reddened at the idea of abandoning his father at such a crisis. And now he must choose definitely between him and his grandfather.

I went up to my father. His plight was more desperate than mine, for I had resembled the condemned before the firing-party, to whom the expected bullet brings a merely physical shock. He, poor man, heard his sentence, which is the heart's pang of death; and how fondly and rootedly he had clung to the idea of my marriage with the princess was shown in his extinction after this blow.

My grandfather chose the moment as a fitting one to ask me for the last time to take my side.

I replied, without offence in the tones of my voice, that I thought my father need not lose me into the bargain, after what he had suffered that day.

He just as quietly rejoined with a recommendation to me to divorce myself for good and all from a scoundrel.

I took my father's arm: he was not in a state to move away unsupported.

My Aunt Dorothy stood weeping; Janet was at the window, no friend to either of us.

I said to her, "You have your wish."

She shook her head, but did not look back.

My grandfather watched me, step by step, until I had reached the door.

"You're going, are you?" he said. "Then I whistle you off my fingers!"

My grandfather lived eight months after a scene that had afforded him high gratification at the heaviest cost a plain man can pay for his pleasures : it killed him.

If the romance does not finish here, it is because the fundamental idea in the book is not the long rivalry between Mr. Beltham and Richmond Roy, but the moral education of a young man, the history of a psychological ordeal, such as we find in *Evan Harrington, Sandra Belloni, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and almost all Meredith's romances. Consequently if Harry Richmond had not completed his apprenticeship, the author's imagination would not have been satisfied ; and that is why the scene we have just been picturing is prolonged in an epilogue.

Determined to develop the incidents to their fullest extent, to trace the feelings to their logical extremes, George Meredith now tells of the bitter cross which his hero must bear before he can deserve a happy and tranquil domestic life with so perfect a being as Janet Ilchester. . . . It is true, in fact, that Harry Richmond did not grieve exclusively for the loss of Princess Ottilia. He was soon cured of his fancies. But he had much to do to discipline his egotistical desires, and to banish those ambitious ideas of which he had become possessed under Richmond Roy's influence.

When at length he humbly begged his cousin's hand, and when, after painful trials, Janet and Harry felt themselves disciplined and purified, they were

astonished at not having realised sooner how dear they were to one another.

They both longed to return to Riversley. But on arriving at the Grange, the young married couple found themselves present at a terrible catastrophe, a symbol of the calamities which a vain and impenitent "sentimentalism" provides.

Richmond Roy was now but the shade of himself. Sometimes he lived with Harry, sometimes with the Bulsteds. Often upon remembering his former triumph, the poor fellow would shake his rattle; but it was destroyed and would give out no sound. He became more depressed from day to day. But when he heard of Harry's marriage with Janet Ilchester, his former vivacity returned, and he wished to precede the young couple, in order to prepare for them a triumphal reception at Riversley. It was thus while organising a new fête—which should be the most magnificent in his life—that he organised a new disaster. This ill-fated pyrotechnist set fire to Riversley Grange, and perished in the flames, a victim to his own extravagance. But let us use Harry Richmond's words. They will give us a graphic account of the fire at Riversley Grange:

> Villagers, tenants, farm-labourers, groups of a deputation that had gone to the railway-station to give us welcome, and returned, owing to a delay in our arrival, stood gazing from all quarters. The Grange was burning in two great wings, that soared in flame-tips and columns of crimson smoke, leaving the central halls and chambers

untouched as yet, but alive inside with mysterious ranges of lights, now curtained, now made bare—a feeble contrast to the savage blaze to right and left, save for the wonder aroused as to its significance. These were soon cloaked. Dead sable reigned in them, and at once a jet of flame gave the whole vast building to destruction. My wife thrust her hand in mine. Fire at the heart, fire at the wings—our old home stood in that majesty of horror which freezes the limbs of men, bidding them look and no more.

"What has Riversley done to deserve this?" I heard Janet murmur to herself. "His room!" she said, when at the south-east wing, where my old grandfather had slept, there burst a glut of flame. We drove down to the park and along the carriage-road to the first red line of gazers. They told us that no living creatures were in the house. My Aunt Dorothy was at Bulsted. I perceived my father's man Tollingby among the servants, and called him to me; others came, and out of a clatter of tongues, and all eyes fearfully askant at the wall of fire, we gathered that a great reception had been prepared for us by my father: lamps, lights in all the rooms, torches in the hall, illuminations along the windows, stores of fireworks, such a display as only he could have dreamed of. The fire had broken out at dusk, from an explosion of fireworks at one wing and some inexplicable mismanagement at the other. But the house must have been like a mine, what with the powder, the torches, the devices in paper and muslin, and the extraordinary decorations fitted up to celebrate our return in harmony with my father's fancy.

Gentlemen on horseback dashed up to us. Captain Bulsted seized my hand. He was hot from a ride to fetch engines, and sang sharp in my ear, "Have you got him?" It was my father he meant. The cry rose for my

father, and the groups were agitated and split, and the name of the missing man, without an answer to it, shouted. Captain Bulsted had left him bravely attempting to quench the flames after the explosion of fireworks. He rode about, interrogating the frightened servants and grooms holding horses and dogs. They could tell us that the cattle were safe, not a word of my father ; and amid shrieks of women at fresh falls of timber and ceiling into the pit of fire, and warnings from the men, we ran the heated circle of the building to find a loophole and offer aid if a living soul should be left ; the night around us bright as day, busier than day, and a human now added to elemental horror. Janet would not quit her place. She sent her carriage-horses to Bulsted, and sat in the carriage to see the last of burning Riversley. Each time that I came to her she folded her arms on my neck and kissed me silently.

We gathered from the subsequent testimony of men and women of the household who had collected their wits, that my father must have remained in the doomed old house to look to the safety of my Aunt Dorothy. He was never seen again.

. . . . . .

Though Richmond Roy never more reappears at Riversley Grange, he will haunt our memories for years. Whoever has seen him in Meredith's romance will always think of him as the model of ambitious and unscrupulous adventurers,—of an order so outstanding, with colours so striking, that the remembrance of him obliterates reality, and casts the living into the shade, as being pale imitators without his genius. Richmond Roy, this fictitious impostor, stands out more clearly than other

impostors famous in history: Pougatcheff and Naundorff lacked his audacity and effrontery; Gaspard Hauser did not recount his misfortunes with such emotion; Perkin Warbeck, who has inspired Schiller and John Ford, had not that irresistible charm, when he aimed at a throne, and endeavoured to claim the hand of a princess. These real impostors make a sad show beside Richmond Roy. Without his sincerity, they lack his ease of manner. Some seem puppets, others monsters. The advantage that Richmond Roy maintains over those of his kind is the subtle composition of his extraordinary spirit, a mixture of frankness and treachery, disinterestedness and egoism, nobleness and vulgarity, candour and craft; this happy and unique mixture prevents him from being either altogether odious or altogether grotesque.

CHAPTER IV

GEORGE MEREDITH'S ART

THE delicacy and profusion of works of art in certain overcrowded museums neutralise the general effect. Thus even an incisive mind is dulled upon a first visit to the galleries of South Kensington. One feels confused, weakened. . . . To return immediately would be but to aggravate the vertigo. . . . The smallest glass-cases are changed into so many mysterious archipelagos, where the eye discerns with dismay, a display of minute wonders. Similarly, at a cursory glance, neither *The Egoist* nor *Diana of the Crossways* acquaints us with Meredith's style: their dazzling complexities disconcert an inexperienced reader. . . .

But is it not by way of simple things that one comes to the composite? . . . Let us begin always with nature. The best remedy for our literary perplexities is to study at first hand passages from Meredith. The novelist's caprices will dishearten us less if we learn to know him as a lyric poet.

. . .

Follow him upon the greensward upon a calm and

hazy morning. At the first rays of a dawn fresh and clear, he saunters abroad thoughtless of his appearance, and forgetful altogether of his writings. Upon the lightest rustle, before even one knows what agile and impetuous thing has escaped from the corn, George Meredith with a cry of delight recognises the bird which soars on high. . . . Have you heard the hautbois reply to the flute in a beautiful pastoral symphony? . . . It is thus that Meredith conveys to us in human language, with the same tone, the same rhythm, the chant of the lark:

> He rises and begins to round,
> He drops the silver chain of sound,
> Of many links without a break,
> In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake,
> All intervolved and spreading wide,
> Like water-dimples down a tide
> Where ripple ripple overcurls
> And eddy into eddy whirls;
> A press of hurried notes that run
> So fleet they scarce are more than one,
> Yet changeingly the trills repeat
> And linger ringing while they fleet,
> Sweet to the quick o' the ear, and dear
> To her beyond the handmaid ear,
> Who sits beside our inner springs.[1]

Let us rest awhile and take breath! . . . How are we to translate this unparalleled musical phrasing, extended upon the same theme for sixty-four lines, so limpid and so full? How are we to translate this perpetual, unfaltering song? Have we under our eyes a poetic or musical imitation?

[1] *The Lark Ascending*, in *Poems of the Joy of Earth*

. . . Neither. It is the lark itself which carols. . . . With this sole difference, that its warblings are comprehensible.

Meredith makes no chain of external perceptions. Enthusiasm, at its height, creates in him a kind of hallucination. In idea he casts himself into the heart of a phenomenon, then, instead of describing it, he endeavours to reproduce it. . . .

You have to do with a prophet ; that is the truth of the matter. . . . And, having got over your first astonishment, your spirit accommodates itself to this new kind of poetry, although the adaptation is not possible without some effort.

But you are not yet at the end of your difficulties. Above all, don't forget this : Pegasus has no fear of sudden caprice. Have an eye upon his conduct ! A leap, a sudden shy, and you are in the dust. . . . What has happened ? . . . Merely that the poet, with the most naive grace in the world, has changed his attitude : he has thrown himself beyond the songster in order to consider it as a symbol ; he plays the part of philosopher. This, in a few words, is the argument :

" Never has human song expressed our inmost being with as much fire, with as much sweetness as this truthful lark. . . . And why ? Why are not our outpourings altogether musical and truth-bearing ? . . . Alas ! the torrent of our passions becomes a tumultuous flood, and it is first necessary

to calm ourselves before we utter words of wisdom. We have no interpreter so pure, so angelically impersonal, whom the millions may applaud as eloquent spokesman, while in their name he greets the sun.

" If the lark so easily accomplishes its flight and song, it is because, living in accordance with the resources of the earth, the happy bird asserts the perfection of its well-ordained existence. . . . We others, always far removed from the normal diapason of life, we whose destinies abound in discords, where should we find such singers ! . . . A mere handful of noble souls, some still alive, others departed, teach us the elements of a future harmony. They had the clarion voice, and the divine beat of wing. Their lives alone—whether they sang or not—have the melody of a hymn of joy. We owe them sweet song. They go forth as the lark ; as the lark, they fill the plains of earth and sky with showers drawn from human stores ; as the lark, they soar in upper air, then, when their circlings are lost in the light of the sun, there remains, in the blue air, only the imagination of them which still is singing. . . ."

. . .

The ode entitled *The Lark Ascending*, published by Meredith at a mature age, 1881, discloses his remarkable ability in manipulating and combining elements of every kind. He yokes, despite their manifest incompatibility, dithyramb and dissertation, music and metaphysics. Have no fear if he sometimes neglects the principal theme ! He always

revives it, and at such a place that he may glorify the precept which was withheld, with some beautiful idea. Thus did Plato with his allegories and myths. Indeed in George Meredith's work poetry and prose mingle in harmony. Return to our lark. . . . At the outset, circling above the corn, it gives sensuous delight to our eyes and ears; afterwards, as it mounts aloft, it symbolises human progress, the mysterious nuptial of sky and earth, and it is then that it recompenses, with a chaste and spiritual delight, the soul which contemplates it.

Are you disturbed by these changes? Do you not agree that the visible should lead to the invisible, the material to the spiritual? . . . Do you dislike unprecedented modulations, the sudden opening of doors upon vistas of transient sublimity? Ah, well! then have nothing to do with Meredith. . . . His most affecting cadences, his most sumptuous decorations, the myriad charms of his orchestra and canvas serve but to enliven the gloomy ways of his reasoning. . . . Ideological *The Appeasement of Demeter!* Ideological again his charming vernal allegory *The Day of the Daughter of Hades!* Ideological too his all-embracing parable of the good physician *Melampus!* . . .

If Meredith sings, if he paints, it is not merely from love of music, or love of colour. On the contrary, colour itself becomes a theme for abstract speculation in the *Hymn to Colour*. . . . And when

perchance he yields to the vogue, to the frivolous taste of the day, which claims "art for art's sake," he produces only a work of the third order, a work banal and degenerate. . . . We should not ask from him ballads or German *Lieder* after the manner of Schubert or Schumann: these trifles do not suit his humour. And the poems of 1851 prove this.

In fact, in order that Meredith should be truly Meredithian, his reason must be kept within bounds. His poetry can be only the poetry of pure idea. Its very nature demands constraint, a severe and judicious guardianship. "To serve! to serve!" such is his cry. . . . Meredith has never let himself be dazzled as was his comrade Swinburne by the magnificent music of flowing periods. He does not envy the pre-Raphaelites their hypocritical and pretentious ingenuity, their worship of archaism. A short poem, in some places touching, *Marguerite upon the eve of her Wedding*, is all that he owes to the influence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His Muse does not seek, like the virgins of Burne-Jones, vain and melancholy resemblances upon the surface of still waters. It has no "mirror of youth," but the deep mystery of human thought. So that later, when he found himself in full possession of a wisdom, in which intuition was verified by experience, Meredith revived that demonstrative form of poetry which seemed to have been extinct since the days of Lucretius or Xenophon, Parmenides or Empedocles.

A strange revival for the nineteenth century which terrified many.

But some, more hostile, simply dismissed his poetry as so much prose ; a poetry which dares to make use of reflection. They scorned Meredith—that pedantic usurper, that perverse novelist who violated poetry.

. . .

Assuredly, logic and analysis encroached many times upon Meredith's lyricism. This is incontestable, and we have all regretted it when reading the *Ode to the Comic Spirit,* or *The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady.* But what we affirm is, that the poet has the right, in some cases, to adopt the attitude and intellectual processes of the philosopher. We most energetically maintain this, for we are not desirous of losing either the lyric poetry of Goethe in which there is so much that is precious, or the entire second part of *Faust.* This absurd quarrel of styles does not now concern us. The essential thing is that the born poet reveals himself in his qualities of passion, and of enthusiasm, through his own invincible power of giving delight.

George Meredith himself was convinced of his poetic ability :

" Chiefly by that in my poetry which emphasises the unity of life, the soul that breathes through the universe, do I wish to be remembered : for the spiritual is the eternal. Only a few read my verse,

and yet it is that for which I care most. It is vexatious to see how judges from whom one looks for discernment miss the point. There was a review of Trevelyan's book on my poetry in last week's *Times*, complaining of the shadowy figure of Ildico in the *Nuptials of Attila*. I was not telling a love-story; my subject was the fall of an empire. I began with poetry and I shall finish with it." [1]

He was not mistaken. The poet is recognised in George Meredith by his fervent effusions, which overflow—even in his stories—in so impetuous a flood, in glittering imagery, in vast and labyrinthine interludes which flow along like orchestral accompaniments in our modern operas, like the strophes and anti-strophes of an ancient choir. It is not only in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* that he interpolates a "diversion upon a penny whistle," but he does the same in each of his novels, from *The Shaving of Shagpat* to *The Amazing Marriage*. Thus a second faction, not less blind than the first, but more hypocritical, granting Meredith neither vigour nor imagination, pities this great poet entangled in the throes of prose, as an albatross of powerful flight is entrapped in a ravine.

Thus the poets hand Meredith over to the prose-writers: the novelists, in their turn, hand him back to the poets, and the latter finally deliver him up to the philosophers. But what exasperates

[1] Edward Clodd, article already mentioned.

them all are his sallies, his fusillades and his glittering style.

" Wit in a poet ? In a novelist ? Pshaw ! what absurdity ! It is pardoned in a man of the world, in a journalist, in a public lecturer, even in a comic author. . . ."

Upon this, forgetting that in matter of wit the best endowed never possessed but the bare amount necessary, they indignantly denounce the preamble to *Diana of the Crossways*, certain passages of *Evan Harrington*, which are evidently designed for light comedy, the grotesque trials of Algernon Blancove in *Rhoda Fleming*, certain tirades, in turn dazzling and obscure, in the *Essay upon Comedy*, *The Egoist*, *One of our Conquerors* and *The Amazing Marriage*. . . . These superfine folk cavil at the three Miss Poles,[1] at the talkative Mrs. Chump [2] (the more so because her Irish patois is pure affectation !) and against that shrew Mrs. Pagnell, whose plebeian animation debases *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*. Oh, how one desires to remove these prejudices from their minds ! . . . But we must here beware : satire has always borrowed its spicy remarks from farce. And will you cast overboard, with no further trial, the art of a Hogarth, of a Goya, a Daumier or of a Gavarni ?

After all, however much Meredith's poetry touches upon philosophy, however much the novelist

[1] *Sandra Belloni.* [2] *Ibid.*

in him arrogates to himself the attributes, the immunities and the licence of a poet, and however much the finest humour gives relish both to his prose and verse—is there any real objection? How can we reproach him for having broken through artistic traditions, since such exist not in this country of Great Britain, ever noted as a veritable Eldorado for every kind of sect?

Let us endeavour to see quite clearly. Personalities exuberant and daring cannot be kept within bounds. When a Beethoven wilfully embellishes the contracted form of the quartette; when a Wagner conceives and brings about a more complete union between the drama and the symphony; when a George Meredith, of himself, assumes the rôle of man of wit, of novelist, of lyric poet, and of thinker, —each of these pioneers is exposed to wild recriminations. We should therefore pay no attention to the unjust yet inevitable attacks upon George Meredith, if we had not met among his detractors two men of great talent: Mr. George Moore, who has always treated him with scorn, and Oscar Wilde, who directed against him, in 1889, the following epigram:

"His style is chaos illumined by flashes of lightning. As a writer he has mastered everything except language: as a novelist he can do everything, except tell a story: as an artist he is everything except articulate. . . ." [1]

[1] "The Decay of Lying" in *Intentions*, by Oscar Wilde.

This mischievous remark went the round of the newspapers. But they were careful to suppress what Oscar Wilde wrote two years later in 1891 :

" One incomparable novelist we have now in England, Mr. George Meredith. There are better artists in France, but France has no one whose view of life is so large, so varied, so imaginatively true. There are tellers of stories in Russia who have a more vivid sense of what pain in fiction may be. But to him belongs philosophy in fiction. His people not merely live, but they live in thought. One can see them from myriad points of view. They are suggestive. There is soul in them and around them. They are interpretative and symbolic. And he who made them, those wonderful quickly-moving figures, made them for his own pleasure, and has never asked the public what they wanted, has never cared to know what they wanted, has never allowed the public to dictate to him or influence him in any way, but has gone on intensifying his own personality, and producing his own individual work. At first none came to him. That did not matter. Then the few came to him. That did not change him. The many have come now. He is still the same. He is an incomparable novelist. . . ." [1]

Care was taken not to divulge this magnificent eulogy. Some jackals, sheltering behind Messrs. Oscar Wilde and George Moore, howled insolently at the " eccentric of Box Hill," his " ataxical

[1] *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, by Oscar Wilde.

grimaces," his "incoherent gibberish." . . . To quote only the mildest of their expressions. . . .

Meredith was not ignorant of their diatribes. Then, with bitter irony, he sent word to an American admirer of his: "In England, I am encouraged by only a small number of enthusiasts."

Of course, Meredith's enterprise was hazardous! . . . To stamp upon a modern novel the delights of a cantata; to give such an ode as *The Lark Ascending*, meaning upon meaning, superposed like the oracles of the Sibyl: this unheard-of amalgam of lyricism and prose revolts simple-minded people, and the more so because Meredith's style is not always orthodox. How many illustrious reformers have found themselves in a similar position! They begin by expedients. They establish a new coinage upon whose currency they insist. . . . Lucretius, for example, at the time of transplanting philosophic poetry into Rome, excuses himself on account of the poverty of the language, and the newness of ideas for creating some unusual words:

"Propter egestatem linguæ et rerum novitatem." Though Meredith does not coin new words, he has recourse to a style more vigorous, more alert, more elastic, in order to pass, without any hesitation, from one plane of thought to another. In his own phrase, we see the words stretched to the limit of their meaning, just as we see upon the body of the athlete the vertebræ almost pressing through the

skin. To juggle with fancies, speculations, humour and melodrama, necessitates the most terrible twists and turns. It is not therefore strange that Mr. George Moore and Oscar Wilde should have surprised George Meredith at his thankless task of athlete. But the strangest part of it is, that the nobleness of such an effort should have touched neither one nor the other.

The papers have rivalled each other in declaring that the author of *The Egoist* only condescends to explain himself in *Meredithian ;* that his phrases are jargon, hardly intelligible. This sarcasm pricked to the quick the great writer, and he complained to Mr. Edward Clodd : " They have made my name an adjective ! " [1] Apparently he expected rather to receive thanks for having rendered supple a rigid and mechanical syntax without having weakened it. Thanks to the wizard Meredith, English idiom is emancipated, soars high and passionately speaks from there, even as the lark itself in its morning song. . . . Certainly the laws of proportion condemn the first sixty pages of *One of our Conquerors :* they describe to us, with an animation really too detailed, the pangs of a gentleman who discovers a spot of mud upon his immaculate white waistcoat. . . . Sometimes Meredith's ideas become entangled like carts in a crowded thoroughfare. Sometimes, by means of peering at the world as through a magnify-

[1] Edward Clodd, article mentioned.

ing-glass, he gives us the nightmare. . . . But of such idiosyncrasies, there are scarcely any in *Evan Harrington* or *Harry Richmond*. Never was adventure more merrily sustained than in *The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper*. And *The Story of Bhanavar the Beautiful*, that intoxicating interlude in *The Shaving of Shagpat*, what a marvellous example of liquid narration, flowing and imaginative! . . .

When the beds of Procrustes were not too long, they were too short. . . . Similarly, this cramming together of lively emotions and of rational ideas alternates, in the case of Meredith, with lacunæ, nay, even with crevasses. He eliminates with excessive rigour all that lacks relief. In contrast to a Tolstoy, who assigns to the most simple incidents of daily life a solemn meaning; in contrast to a Maeterlinck, so ready to scent from afar some mystery, Meredith essays to sift circumstances, to weigh them with care, and with a result always beneficial to sound judgment and art. . . . But this excessively careful selection is apt to render him obscure. It is from excess of scruple that he acquires his defects: something rugged and aloof, a lack of cohesion; something artificial, abrupt, spasmodic. . . . Through dislike of the superfluous, and in order to obtain the essence of things, he cuts short his transitions, omits adjectives, withdraws the verb, suppresses the pronoun, excludes the

article and breaks up the conjunction. . . . He is like the strange rivers of Illyria, which are swallowed up under the earth only to appear again at some distance, bubbling to the surface and stretching out into noble streams.

His intellectual swiftness allows him to wind a subtle skein of syllogisms, whose connections he dexterously conceals. In vain does the reader protest; George Meredith covers his every trace. Finally, by way of ellipses, which are merely implied by way of amazing and enigmatical omissions, he tracks down the most evanescent thought. In proportion as he advances in age, as his thought becomes distilled, his disdain for mediocrity, for banality, increases; he only dreams of singular people in extraordinary positions: a pedagogue for lunatic asylums, Sir Austin Feverel; a Greek merchant, a dilettante and fanatic, Pericles Agriolopoulos;[1] a man-peacock, Sir Willoughby Patterne;[2] reckless and ambitious adventurers as Richmond Roy[3] and the Countess de Saldar;[4] exalted tribunes as Barto Rizzo,[5] Nevil Beauchamp,[6] Doctor Shrapnel,[7] or the socialist Alvan;[8] misanthropes and hypochondriacs such as Antony Hackbut,[9] Lord Ormont[10] and Lord Fleetwood.[11] . . .

"An eccentric?" says Mrs. Lovell,[12] "but that

[1] *Sandra Belloni* and *Vittoria*. [2] *The Egoist*.
[3] *Harry Richmond*. [4] *Evan Harrington*. [5] *Vittoria*.
[6] *Beauchamp's Career*. [7] *Ibid*. [8] *The Tragic Comedians*.
[9] *Rhoda Fleming*. [10] *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*.
[11] *The Amazing Marriage*. [12] *Rhoda Fleming*, Chapter XXVII.

merely means *hors du commun.* The eccentric can perfectly well be natural."

However, despite his affectionate leaning towards queer characters, Meredith always glorifies the excellence of men of balance; men who are disciplined and wholly masters of body, mind and spirit: Vernon Whitford,[1] Merthyr Powys,[2] Dartrey Fenellan,[3] or Redworth.[4] . . . It is for such as these that he reserves his most tender affection. . . .

When a poet soars from height to height without ever touching the earth, it is most glorious. But how shall a novelist vie with the eagles or meteors, forced to be, according to circumstances, either architect or engineer? It is not possible, and George Meredith knows this as well as anyone. But he resigns himself with such vexation to his task, that he does not take the trouble to conceal his workmanship, and he exhibits to us his machinery in such a way as to destroy the illusion. His catastrophes sometimes are thrust upon us with startling suddenness. Can we believe that his Diana,[5]—that young woman, not only intelligent but pure, worthy, proud and of a magnanimous heart,—suddenly sells to an editor a dangerous State secret, which a friend has confided to her? Similarly, in *Modern Love*, because the author does not

[1] *The Egoist.*
[2] *Sandra Belloni* and *Vittoria.*
[3] *One of our Conquerors.*
[4] *Diana of the Crossways.*
[5] *Diana of the Crossways.*

expressly state that the heroine dies, certain persons have essayed to believe that she outlived her painful experiences.[1] We are equally amazed at the birth of a son to Carinthia. It even becomes a sport for the readers of *The Amazing Marriage* to construct hypotheses upon the relations between Lord Fleetwood and his wife. Such expressions as these are whispered in the ear: "You remember that village inn, that midnight climb by the ladder leaning against the window? Do you understand? Ah, well! Yes, that's it . . . it was then. . . ."

And Meredith good temperedly admitted this to be so and said: "It is not *The Amazing Marriage* which I should have called my book, but *The Amazing Babe*. . . ."

. . .

A letter which has been already mentioned, and which was written to an admirer across the water on the 22nd of July, 1887, shows us what value Meredith set upon his technique:

"When at the conclusion of your article on my works, you say that a certain change in public taste, should it come about, will be to some extent due to me, you hand me the flowering wreath I covet. For I think that all right use of life, and the one secret of life, is to pave ways for the firmer footing of those who succeed us; as to my works, I know them faulty, think them of worth only when they point

[1] *La Nouvelle Revue Francaise*, 1st of September, 1910, p. 358.

and aid to that end. Close knowledge of our fellows, discernment of the laws of existence, these lead to great civilisation. I have supposed that the novel, exposing and illustrating the natural history of man, may help us to such sustaining roadside gifts. But I have never started on a novel to pursue the theory it developed. The dominant idea in my mind took up the characters and the story midway.

"You say that there are few scenes. Is it so throughout? My method has been to prepare my readers for a crucial exhibition of the *personæ*, and then to give the scene in the fullest of their blood and brain under stress of a fiery situation.

"Concerning style, thought is tough, and dealing with thought produces toughness. Or when strong emotion is in tide against the active mind, there is perforce confusion. Have you found that scenes of simple emotion or plain narrative were hard to view? When their author revised for the new edition, his critical judgment approved these passages. Yet you are not to imagine that he holds his opinion combatively against his critics. The verdict is with the observer.

"In the Comedies,[1] and here and there where a concentrated presentment is in design, you will find a 'pitch' considerably above our common human; and purposely, for only in such a manner could so much be shown. Those high notes and condensings are abandoned when the strong human call is heard

[1] Meredith applies the term of comedy to certain of his novels. The subtitle of *The Egoist* is: *A Comedy in Narrative.*

—I beg you to understand merely that such was my intention.

"Again, when you tell me that Harvard has the works, and that young Harvard reads them, the news is of a kind to prompt me to fresh productiveness and higher. In England I am encouraged but by a few enthusiasts. I read in a critical review of some verses of mine the other day that I was a harlequin and a performer of antics. I am accustomed to that kind of writing, as our hustings orator is to the dead cat and the brickbat flung in his face—at which he smiles politely; and I too; but after many years of it my mind looks elsewhere. . . ."

. . .

What exactly is this "concentrated presentment"?

When Meredith wishes to fix our attention upon a point, he finds all devices useful, and uses them at his own convenience. Small verses of ethical tendency, condensed into the poetic prose of *Shagpat*, aphorisms of the *Pilgrim's Scrip*, which enlighten us—as well as Adrian Harley's epigrams, or the wise and pleasant speeches of Lady Blandish—upon the ordeal imposed upon Richard Feverel; frequent philosophic interruptions, always gladly inserted by the novelist in *Sandra Belloni;* the assertive register of egoism, of which he takes an inventory at the commencement of *The Egoist;* the orderly dissertation upon diaries and diarists with which he introduces *Diana of the Crossways;* in

The Amazing Marriage the tales of Dame Gossip alternate with apocryphal adages from a *Book of Maxims*—all these resources, all these formulæ of a "concentrated presentment," all this display has no other object than to furnish us with more precise information.

This studious preparation reminds one of *Werther*, *Wilhelm Meister* and of the *Wahlverwandtschaften*. . . . In fact, Meredith owed a permanent debt to Germany as a result of his education. And that he freely associates himself with Goethe or Heine is certainly not to his detriment. But one can only regret that he shares, with the Germans, their fetishism for certain false gods: for example, Jean-Paul? . . . Alas! he has suffered from their influence. . . . A labyrinthine maze of digressions, half learned, half comical, an indigestible potpourri of things trivial and sublime, spoil for us his youthful production *Farina*, and even certain parts of *The Egoist*.

. . .

In revenge, when once Meredith has set us going with the story, he unexpectedly changes his method. He casts aside his crutches. The action hastens on. The dialogue clinches more firmly. Pricks of the sword-point, feints, thrusts and replies succeed each other unceasingly. This forms a violent contrast to the peaceful pace of the opening chapters, and only renders more telling the final outburst.

Parallel with this, Meredith inaugurates another composition, another style, another language. . . . After the German influence, discernible in prolix, copious and ceremonious phraseology, with sentences stuffed with learned words, and saturated with erudite allusions, where incidents are insinuated and incrusted with so much complacency, there appears the French method: phrases clear, rapid and short, of a soberness and edge, like to those of Voltaire. They recall—with less dryness—phrases of Laclos, of Mérimée or of Stendhal. . . . But has not Meredith rather the effervescence of a Michelet, the passions and transports of a Saint-Simon? In fact *Evan Harrington, Harry Richmond, Lord Ormont and his Aminta,* in their most beautiful chapters, have the vigour of the famous *Mémoires.* George Meredith himself reveals to us this relationship. Questioned about his literary preferences, he mentions Saint-Simon's character-sketch of the Regent Orleans. . . .[1]

Whoever seeks to ascertain what authors have influenced Meredith, let him not linger with Fielding nor Richardson. But before all, let him think of Nevil Beauchamp's favourite author, that fantastic and eccentric Carlyle. Meredith endows him with certain traits, which are more applicable to himself:

"His favourite author was one writing of Heroes,

[1] See the bibliography of Mr. John Lane, p. xlvii in *George Meredith,* by Mr. Richard Le Gallienne.

in (so she esteemed it) a style resembling either early architecture or utter dilapidation, so loose and rough it seemed; a wind-in-the-orchard style, that tumbled down here and there an appreciable fruit with uncouth bluster; sentences without commencements running to abrupt endings and smoke, like waves against a sea-wall, learned dictionary words giving a hand to street-slang, and accents falling on them haphazard, like slant rays from driving clouds; all the pages in a breeze, the whole book producing a kind of electrical agitation in the mind and the joints. . . ." [1]

Such is the bewildering method that we have already indicated in *The Lark Ascending*. Thus we return to the point where we digressed, and consider the accumulation of ideas, roughly held together, without mortar or cement, resembling unhewn rocks in Cyclopean constructions. But what the most brilliant of comparisons cannot express—even if they were Meredithian!—is the charm and atmosphere of his style, that hidden soul of things which he loves to unveil. There is something in him which is irreducible. A paraphrase, even an ingenious one, always allows the essential thing to escape: those indefinite extensions, that radiant haze, that ever-recurring mystery, surcharged with vague presentiments, which Goethe prized so highly, that he designated it by the German epithet *ahnungsvoll*. . . .

[1] *Beauchamp's Career.*

In Saint-Simon, as in Carlyle, that which fascinated Meredith was the clarion voice, the sensation of shock. . . . This liking for extremes and for intensity produced his desire to deepen and to widen the scope of comedy and tragedy, and to develop both to the furthest possible extent. Never was ridicule administered with greater strength and skill, whether bitter satire or gentle irony. *The Egoist*, seen from this point of view, is a miracle of discernment.

As the fox in La Fontaine slyly exhorts the raven to croak, so Meredith encourages his hero to divest himself of all covering, that we may stand amazed at his glorious nakedness. The stratagem succeeds only too well : " the egoist," with an eagerness that is grotesque, casting aside his every garment ; convinced beforehand of his success, joyful and proud, Sir Willoughby Patterne artlessly lays bare his most hideous deformities. . . . And we do not laugh. We turn away, because this loathsome man resembles us even as a brother, and we tremble lest someone should notice the likeness. Suppose Willoughby Patterne were to mock us ! Suppose he were to cry out suddenly with a devilish sneer :

> ' Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,
> Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère ! '[1]

Such a thing did actually occur. Robert Louis Stevenson relates[2] that Meredith saw one of his

[1] Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Preface.
[2] *The Art of Writing*.

young friends running to his house, on the day after the publication of *The Egoist*. The young man, quite distracted, shouted at the top of his voice: "It is disgraceful! it is abominable! . . . Willoughby is myself!" . . . The poet replied: "My dear fellow, calm yourself! . . . Willoughby is every one of us. . . ."

Despite this benevolent assurance, we feel a vague uneasiness; an apprehension of seeing a life-like picture of ourselves, each time that Sir Willoughby Patterne, the very quintessence of egoism, martyrises that poor Letitia Dale, with whom he has trifled for so many years.

"'And you are well?' The anxious question permitted him to read deeply in her eyes. He found the man he sought there, squeezed him passionately, and let her go. . . ." [1]

Irritating badinage which torments, which soon plays upon our nerves. It is torture to analyse in spite of ourselves, in the soul of a Narcissus, the myriad hateful illusions of self-conceit. The reader stumbles when satire mingles with drama! Is that fantastic chapter from *Sandra Belloni* right in suggesting that "the comic mask has some kinship with the skull"? [2] Perhaps! We are inclined to think so—the more so that one is in doubt whether the scene, where Major Percy Waring urges Mrs. Lovell to marry him, is mere pleasantry or poignant fact:

[1] *The Egoist*. [2] *Sandra Belloni*, title of Chapter XXVI.

"Yes; you will be mine! Half my love of my country and my profession is love of you. Margaret is fire in my blood. I used to pray for opportunities, that Margaret might hear of me. I knew that gallant actions touched her; I would have fallen gladly; I was sure her heart would leap when she heard of me. Let it beat against mine. Speak!"

"I will," said Mrs. Lovell, and she suppressed the throbs of her bosom. Her voice was harsh and her face bloodless. "How much money have you, Percy?"

This sudden sluicing of cold water on his heat of passion petrified him.

"Money," he said, with a strange frigid scrutiny of her features. As in the flash of a mirror, he beheld her bony, worn, sordid, unacceptable. But he was fain to admit it to be an eminently proper demand for enlightenment.

He said deliberately, "I possess an income of five hundred a year, extraneous, and in addition to my pay as major in Her Majesty's service."

Then he paused, and the silence was like a growing chasm between them.

She broke it by saying, "Have you any expectations?"

This was crueller still, though no longer astonishing. He complained in his heart merely that her voice had become so unpleasant.

With emotionless precision he replied, "At my mother's death——"

She interposed a soft exclamation.

" At my mother's death there will come to me, by reversion, five or six thousand pounds. When my father dies, he may possibly bequeath his property to me. On that I cannot count."

Veritable tears were in her eyes. Was she affecting to weep sympathetically in view of these remote contingencies ? [1]

. . .

We have now reached the limits of comedy. Shall we remain here ?

No, let us leap over ! . . . Once in the domain of the tragic, we have no hesitation in stating that Meredith's pathos at least equals his spirit of humour. The conclusions of his novels, especially, always heart-rending, lamentable and disastrous, choke us with their sadness. One cannot even weep ! The only happy ending is that of *The Shaving of Shagpat ;* but even Shibli Bagarag lays his enemy low only after a superhuman struggle. Everywhere besides, the defeated and the tormented, the innocent and the guilty, are precipitated pell-mell into the same abyss. . . . There is Richard Feverel's duel and his young wife's madness ; the dolorous epilogue of *Modern Love ;* Rhoda Fleming's distraction among the violated sacks of gold ; the supreme atonement of Victor Radnor and his companion at

[1] *Rhoda Fleming.*

Mrs. Burman's [1] death-bed; the quarrel between Lady Charlotte Eglett and her brother Lord Ormont over their jewels; the terrible family meeting in which Mr. Beltham assails his son-in-law, Richmond Roy, with such furious invective. . . .[2]

The hold such incidents have upon the mind is the more tenacious, in that they do not fail to please, for all the amazement they cause. The art of the dramatist consists in giving apparent shocks: now, the scenes of which we have made mention, abruptly strong though they may be, are led up to by a most ingenious sequence of events. Meredith himself valued and extolled that *crescendo*, that chromatic scale of intensity, that ceaseless quickening of rhythm, when he said of the correspondence between Robert Browning and his wife:

My first feeling was adverse to the publication, but this wore away on reading them, because of the high level reached. You see Browning's love for the unattractive-looking invalid, and watch the growth of love in her, as it were, under the microscope. You see a spark of life, then the tiny red spot that shall be a heart, then the full pulsation of each blood-corpuscle. So Browning made her a woman![3]

Whenever nervous excitability does not carry him away, whenever he resists his caprice, Meredith

[1] *One of our Conquerors.*
[2] *The Adventures of Harry Richmond.*
[3] Edward Clodd, same article.

brings about his final issues by this very identical process. Everything tends to strengthen the conclusion, to make it more trenchant, more penetrating,—the virile simplicity of expression, the choice of time or of place, the ornament, the blinding rays of light which he projects upon souls hitherto veiled and intangible,—so that his final stage-effect is also the final stroke of his brush.

Consider, for example, *The Adventures of Harry Richmond.* Another writer would have ended this romance sooner: at the point where Mr. Beltham exposes his son-in-law, Richmond Roy, as a low mountebank, as "an impostor at the expense of a provincial spinster." But George Meredith goes farther. He gives Richmond Roy an end more conformable with his genius, more appropriate to his sumptuous, magnificent and daring nature. He describes that autumn evening in the country, when Harry Richmond, after many adventures, returns with his wife Janet to Riversley Grange. . . .

And what but psychology in action and psychology of the finest quality is that final scene, where the beautiful Bhanavar, the wise and daring queen of serpents, assailed by her mutinous vassals, forgets her beauty, the desire for vengeance, the impending menace, the imminent peril, in order to cast one long look of love upon the Arab chief, her lover?[1] King Mashalleed is watching her, surrounded

[1] "The Story of Bhanavar the Beautiful" in *The Shaving of Shagpat.*

by his guards. But Bhanavar the Beautiful, intoxicated with love and passion, has thoughts only of Ruark her lover. . . .

Bhanavar turned her eyes on Ruark, and said sweetly, "Yet shalt thou live to taste again the bliss of the Desert. Pleasant was our time in it, O my Chief!" The King glared and choked, and she said again, "Nor he conquered thee, but I; and I that conquered thee, little will it be for me to conquer him: his threats are the winds of idleness."

Surely the world darkened before the eyes of Mashalleed, and he arose and called to his guard hoarsely, "Have off their heads!" They hesitated, dreading the Queen, and he roared, "Slay them!"

Bhanavar beheld the winking of the steel, but ere the scimitars descended, she seized Ruark, and they stood in a whizzing ring of Serpents, the sound of whom was as the hum of a thousand wires struck by storm-winds. Then she glowed, towering over them with the Chief clasped to her, and crying:

> King of vileness! match thy slaves
> With my creatures of the caves.

And she sang to the Serpents:

> Seize upon him! sting him thro'
> Thrice this day shall pay your due.

But they, instead of obeying her injunction, made narrower their circle round Bhanavar and the Chief. She yellowed, and took hold of the nearest Serpent horribly, crying:

> Dare against me to rebel,
> Ye, the bitter brood of hell?

And the Serpent gasped in reply :

> One the kiss to us secures :
> Give us ours, and we are yours.

Thereupon another of the Serpents swung on the feet of Ruark, winding his length upward round the body of the Chief ; so she tugged at that one, tearing it from him violently, and crying :

> Him ye shall not have, I swear !
> Seize the King that's crouching there.

And that Serpent hissed :

> This is he the kiss ensures :
> Give us ours, and we are yours.

Another and another Serpent she flung from the Chief, and they began to swarm venomously, answering her no more. Then Ruark bore witness to his faith, and folded his arms with the grave smile she had known in the desert ; and Bhanavar struggled and tussled with the Serpents in fierceness, strangling and tossing them to right and left.

" Great is Allah ! " cried all present, and the King trembled, for never was sight like that seen, the hall flashing with the Serpents, and a woman-Serpent, their Queen, raging to save one from their fury, shrieking at intervals :

> Never, never shall ye fold,
> Save with me the man I hold.

But now the hiss and scream of the Serpents and the noise of their circling was quickened to a slurred savage sound, and they closed on Ruark, and she felt him stifling and that they were relentless. So

in the height of the tempest Bhanavar seized the Jewel in the gold circlet on her brow and cast it from her. Lo! the Serpents instantly abated their frenzy, and flew all of them to pluck the Jewel, chasing the one that had it in his fangs through the casement, and the hall breathed empty of them. Then in the silence that was, Bhanavar veiled her face and said to the Chief, "Pass from the hall while they yet dread me. No longer am I Queen of Serpents."

But he replied, "Nay! said I not my soul is thine?"

She cried to him, "Seest thou not the change in me? I was bound to those Serpents for my beauty, and 'tis gone! Now am I powerless, hateful to look on, O Ruark, my Chief!"

He remained still, saying, "What thou hast been thou art."

She exclaimed, "O true soul, the light is hateful to me as I to the light; but I will yet save thee to comfort Rukrooth, thy mother."

So she drew him with her swiftly from the hall of the King ere the King had recovered his voice of command; but now the wrath of the All-powerful was upon her and him! Surely within an hour from the flight of the Serpents, the slaves and soldiers of Mashalleed laid at his feet two heads that were the heads of Ruark and Bhanavar; and they said, "O great King, we tracked them to her chamber and through to a passage and a vault hung with

black, wherein were two corpses, one in a tomb and one unburied, and we slew them there, clasping each other, O King of the age ! "

Mashalleed gazed upon the head of Bhanavar and sighed, for death had made the head again fair with a wondrous beauty, a loveliness never before seen on earth.

It is necessary to have read in the text such great masterpieces, to know them in their proper setting and atmosphere, in order to realise how far dramatic intensity can attain outside an actual play and to sympathise with those fervent admirers who have compared George Meredith to William Shakespeare.

. . .

But we may ask: " Why this comparison to a dramatist ? Why mention the great name of Shakespeare ? "

Visionaries both, Shakespeare and Meredith felt with equal intensity. They catch glimpses of the world and of mankind, as a traveller by night sees the country-side in the brilliance of a sudden lightning-flash. With the obvious differences of circumstance and place, Meredith presents his Sir Willoughby Patterne as Shakespeare presents his Richard III. The perplexed egoist, who demands a bride at any cost in order to safeguard his "amour-propre," is no less real than the royal assassin who cries: " A horse ! a horse ! my kingdom for a horse ! " . . .

Meredith has related his first meeting with one of

his most characteristic personages. It was really Shakespearian :

" When Harry Richmond's father first met me, when I heard the pompous speech of this son of a royal duke, and of an actress of seventeen, I remember having broken out into peals of laughter ! " [1]

Yes, Meredith bears a greater resemblance to Shakespeare than any other novelist. How shall we compare our Balzac with Meredith, for example ? . . . The former rigidly arranges his characters in the period in France conformable with the fifty years 1789 to 1839 ; and presents to us prototypes clothed, arranged and furnished in the manner of Rastignac and Maxime de Trailles. But Meredith's heroes only disclose the most precious, the most hidden part of their being. As far as appearance and behaviour are concerned, one could mistake these nineteenth-century characters for natives of Ophir or of Thule, or for contemporaries of Swift, Sheridan, Sterne and Smollett.

Let us at once say that they are not personages ; still less types in the ordinary sense of the word ; but rather epitomes of types, animated by a life altogether uncreate, as Alceste, the melancholy Jacques, Harpagon or Shylock. We have never seen them ; there is no probability of our ever meeting them ;—although we know them well. They

[1] Marcel Schwob, *Spicilège*.

may well be incompatible with a society such as ours. However, although occasionally they do resemble certain definite individuals, they are wondrously typical of their class as a body. If they are not real, nor "life-like" as are the heroes of Dickens, Thackeray, Balzac or Flaubert, they are truer, more significant, for they partake of that permanence of truth, which Shakespeare and Molière alone fully possess. Drive them away, treat them as phantoms, as phantoms they return and persistently haunt the memory. A character from Dickens passes for ever from our remembrance as soon as the thread of adventure is broken. On the contrary, Willoughby Patterne, Austin Feverel, Richmond Roy, Sandra Belloni or Rhoda Fleming, even if one forgets some details of their career, remain, thrust themselves upon, and take possession of our fancy. Like Shakespeare's creations, they live beyond time and space. They are, in the true sense, characteristic. They are the offspring only of the very highest art.

. . .

But an art which is not distinctive of one style, an art which floats capriciously between Goethe, Carlyle, Saint-Simon, Voltaire, Jean-Paul and Shakespeare, an art where all influences, all tendencies co-exist without being confounded,—can so varied an art have any unity? How can it be homogeneous in the presence of these living forces

and outward splendour? And if Meredith's art admits of no discipline, no regulations, in what way does he differ from any "decadent"? Will he not have mused, in lyric verse and analytic prose, upon nuptials a thousand times more fantastic than that between Harry Richmond and Princess Ottilia? And why does he shrink from a system even more chimerical and apparently more arbitrary than that of Sir Austin Feverel?

The reply is simple.

A piece, *The Olive Branch,* begins the collection of poems of 1851. And, from this poem down to the last verses of 1909, that which constitutes the unity of his whole work, that which gives him his skill, his charm, his vast compass, is his unchanging intellectual standard. From his first utterances to his philosophical codicils, through an immense gallery of romantic creations, Meredith has always employed his genius with its innumerable resources, for the advancing of the same ideas, the metaphysical and moral convictions which constitute his very being. It is thus that he has been able to bring about, without loss of balance, an enterprise far more amazing than *The Amazing Marriage* of Lord Fleetwood and Carinthia: the union of English poetry and English prose. And that is why it is quite in vain to grapple with *The Egoist* or *Diana of the Crossways,* before his poems have taught us the twofold notion of the earth and the spirit of comedy.

CHAPTER V

GEORGE MEREDITH'S TEACHING

MOST poets do not think deeply. If they are inclined to do so, they become pessimists.

In the latter case they covet a nirvana after the sour manner of a Hindu recluse ; in the former they plant within themselves a secret nostalgia. Melancholy musicians all of them, they sing in a minor key of their disenchantment. They suffer from a vague chagrin which they cherish and nourish as the source even of inspiration. Their vagrant curiosity plunges headlong into every realm of fancy : like the capricious *globe-trotters* who go from the Crimea to Ceylon, from the lakes of Finland to the archipelagos of the Pacific, from the falls of Niagara to the sandy wastes of the great Pyramid—it never rests, for it never finds either abiding place or repose.

Poets generally abhor the present : for them there are no beautiful women but those of ancient times ; their joys are as fleeting as the snows of yesteryear ; the only journeys they will undertake are to the lands of myth, "anywhere out of the world." . . . And the soul, having nothing to regret but the past,

nothing to desire but the future, accepts the illusion which comes to it either in dream or intoxication. It interrogates myths, legends, more rarely history. A sudden escape from reality is Art's ideal.

Pour réjouir un cœur qui hait la vérité. . . .

Magicians like Coleridge, Byron, Shelley or Swinburne, transport us to a fairy world where the soul's exclusive delight is to glorify nature in all her myriad moods: the dawn, the moon, the multi-coloured twilight, even the chilly blast which scatters the dead leaves of autumn. It would not matter if poets confined themselves to extolling the open-air life, the life full and free, the broad landscapes bathed in light! But they heave admirably modulated sighs, they bewail our trite occupations, they make lament and discourage us, so much so, that they make distasteful our humdrum life with its duties and its cares. And then, when they see us spiritless, and aghast, rebels against our duties, well-nigh crushed by the hatred of it all, by way of tonic and stimulant they offer us their perfect masterpieces! . . .

For this reason Plato banished from his republic these too subtle teachers. . . . But George Meredith would have found favour in his eyes. True poet though he is, George Meredith never loses touch with reality, and above all never attempts to deny it. His teaching creates no gulf between Nature

and humanity. On the contrary, it reveals them to us working together upon the same task; it affirms that the most elevated means of money-making cannot be all-absorbing, and readily assimilates that thoughtful and serene saying of the *Ramayana:* "Duty is the essence of the world."

For it is the world as it is, not an ideal world, that Meredith examines with his penetrating eyes Even in fantasy, such as *The Shaving of Shagpat*, he never loses sight of it. For him, life on earth is not a time of exile. Far from disparaging it as did Byron,[1] Chateaubriand, or Empedocles,[2] who cast himself headlong into Etna through sheer lust for glory, he recognises in it at once the cause, the indispensable condition and the divine purpose of our existence. Could an architect in the material world build elsewhere than upon Earth? He could not; and in the same way in the spiritual world, it is solely upon the conception of Earth that George Meredith finds his ultimate basis. Why should he pretend to converse with the clouds, crouched in a suspended basket, as Socrates is depicted by Aristophanes? . . . It is upon Earth that the poet-novelist would erect a dwelling at once stable and habitable.

[1] See *Manfred*, a short poem in which Meredith gives a not very flattering portrait of Lord Byron.

[2] See *Empedocles*, another type of George Meredith's satirical poems.

THE CONCEPTION OF EARTH.

George Meredith maintains that all morality and all science must be founded upon the conception of Earth. How shall we build upon the unknown? We know only Earth, our one and ever-present friend. She is the only particle of the universe that we can ever know, our only refuge amidst the immensity of things. Other conceptions are but mists and mirages. . . . Let us restrain our ambitious soaring towards the skies! The earth after all is our heaven.

"We do not get to any heaven by renouncing the Mother we spring from; and when there is an eternal secret for us, it is best to believe that Earth knows, to keep near her, even in our utmost aspirations. . . ." [1]

So speaks Matey Weyburn upon his knees before his mother's dead body. And the poet approves: for Earth will never delude us!

> By my faith, there is feasting to come,
> Not the less, when our Earth we have seen
> Beneath and on surface, her deeds and designs:
> Who gives us the man-loving Nazarene,
> The martyrs, the poets, the corn, and the vines . . .[2]

Besides, recent discoveries reveal our origin. Philosophers, geologists and many great naturalists such as Darwin have been able to adjust our

[1] *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, chapter XIV.
[2] *The Empty Purse.*

genealogical table. And since Earth has given us a body, an intelligence, a soul, we can truly speak of her as a mother who has given us our birth. Shall we refuse her this tender and rightful name ? When Meredith invokes " his Mother," he always means the Earth. And very often he speaks of her only by the feminine pronoun. The reader is astonished at first ; but his perplexity soon disappears : " She " can be none other than Earth.

Meredith speaks of her each time with an enthusiasm in which there is a mingling of pride. . . . Pride of establishing at last a real sonship ! Pride of possessing at last our true home ! We are no longer a fortuitous accident upon the face of the Earth ; we have not been thrown upon the globe as angels banished from the skies : our race has the right to call itself indigenous.

Nearly all Meredith's poems treat of landscape ; they are verbal and most accurate pictures of Earth and of her most fleeting aspects : play of light and shade, warblings of birds, and buzzing of bees. . . . Here Nature is not reduced to a piece of stage scenery, painted and arranged for sensuous delight, but she exists as an authority, permanent and inevitable. Even without our knowledge she is supreme judge in conflicts of sentiment or intellect. Though invisible, she displays her all-pervading power, as did fate in ancient dramas. We must call upon her each time that a novel or a poem by Meredith

does not immediately yield up its inner meaning. Neither is it a question here of Nature, as something indeterminate and elusive, but of Earth herself. That is why, in Meredith's works, the name of Nature occurs less frequently than that of Earth.

. . .

However, George Meredith builds neither a religion nor a morality upon his conception of Earth. Indifferent to philosophical controversies, a stranger to systems and creeds, Meredith does not arrive at his conclusion upon Earth by a series of inductions. Earth is for him an inborn idea, resident in him as he is part of her. He conceives his own existence as distinctly as that of rivers and trees. The external and the internal world are alike limited to him by his all-embracing mind. He counts the pulsations of innumerable small lives, obscurely and silently confederated, whose sum constitutes this superior organism that we call Earth.

Meredith's thoughts are given as direct messages from Earth. They do not demand from his contemporaries either glory or favour. They extend invitation only to volunteers, to the elect, to that small and honourable minority which Stendhal used to call "the happy few." To these only is proclaimed the teaching of Earth, as the gospel announces to us all the words of our Saviour.

. . .

Certain critics across the Channel, fervent com-

mentators upon Holy Writ, have been exceedingly struck by Meredith's solemnity. They attempt to credit him with the virtues of a prophet, and publish abroad that he is " the prophet of sanity." [1] Well, perhaps so ! This is justified in proportion as Earth has need of " health " for the conservation, the multiplication and evolution of its species. But this would be false if the qualification implied a predominant tendency towards morality in the poet. According to Meredith, morality, like all other hygienic measures which society has adopted, must be much less an end than a means : the means of furthering more efficaciously the secret tendencies of Earth.

Could this morality be the morality of Christianity ? It is almost impossible ! . . . The Christian moralist discredits Earth, when he explains man's spiritual grandeur by a presentiment of future felicity, or perhaps by some dim reminiscence of celestial perfection.

" And why should we be insolvent ? " cries Meredith. . . . We have no need of an element outside of ourselves to guarantee to us the beauty or the nobleness of our being. From whence do saints, heroes, despisers of material things, and

[1] The expression belongs to Mr. George Macaulay Trevelyan, occurring more than once in his excellent book, *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith*. This expression has now become current, and English journalists do not fail to use it on every occasion when dealing with Meredith's style and genius.

workers devoted to their neighbours derive the power to conquer their egotism if not from their intense love of Earth ? . . . Yes, it is the spirit of Earth which curbs our passions and supports our moral laws ! . . . As to universal laws, if we manifest so great a desire to determine them, if in this respect we are able to form a favourable opinion of them, it is that celestial bodies as so many varied forms of Earth, sisters scattered above our planet, its guardians or its parents.

In a sublime poem, *Meditation under Stars*, Meredith apostrophises them thus :

So may we read, and little find them cold :
Not frosty lamps illumining dead space,
Not distant aliens, not senseless Powers.
The fire is in them whereof we are born ;
The music of their motion may be ours.
Spirit shall deem them beckoning Earth and voiced
Sisterly to her, in her beams rejoiced.
Of love, the grand impulsion, we behold
The love that lends her grace
Among the starry fold.
Then at new flood of customary morn,
Look at her through her showers,
Her mists, her streaming gold,
A wonder edges the familiar face :
She wears no more that robe of printed hours ;
Half strange seems Earth, and sweeter than her flowers.

An egoist is never raised to the height of these meditations. He has voluntarily uprooted himself from the earth. Stand in awe of the solitudes, the poet advises us, and run not the risk of offending our Mother ! Between her and you establish

contact, cost what it may. Forget yourself, sacrifice yourself, rather than forget her! . . . This is the price of wisdom. . . .

To forget oneself voluntarily? . . . In reality the sacrifice is almost always too much for our powers. If one essays to forget oneself, one rarely succeeds. But the inherited experience of humanity was not amassed in a single day, and even as our ancestors were prodigal of their sweat and blood, we also shall have to pay dearly for the freedom. Each of us at certain periods must in miniature live over again the history of the human race. . . . Inevitable crises and ordeals over which Meredith delighted to ponder. . . . *The Shaving of Shagpat,* his Oriental fantasy, has exposed since 1855 the phases of a hard noviciate; *Richard Feverel,* his first novel, was, by its title, an "ordeal." His succeeding novels could claim a similar subtitle, for each of them in its different way analyses a soul's apprenticeship.

. . .

Our slow and stormy evolution, our competition, our strivings, our duties, will they lead us anew to the Golden Age? Will they bring us once more to some land of Cocagne?

Meredith hardly thinks so. Far from deluding us by the hope of a promised crown, he states quite clearly that there is not upon earth a definite victory, or a laurel wreath for the conqueror. In effect, a

triumph, the halo of glory, the deification of a human being, admit of repose or at least of a relaxation of effort. But life admits of no cessation. And since progress is vital to us, it would be impossible to assign to it a limit. We mutually work for a progress essentially indefinite. Nevertheless, in default of an end defined for us, we regard with satisfaction the standard we have reached: certain blameless lives the memory of which is ever present; noted examples of bravery and virtue which have been bequeathed to us; high-souled men and women who have paved the way for posterity,—from age to age such is our recompense! . . . And what matters it if this recompense be not ours during our lifetime! Future generations will not fail to give us our due.

Thus it is obvious that the chain of events continues without a break, and that each will bear, sooner or later, the consequences of his acts. Further, the fact that our sins are not injurious to ourselves alone is a most serious reason for a rigid control over our conduct. Meredith shows us how the innocent are overwhelmed, annihilated by the calamities brought about by the guilty: Evan Harrington pays the penalty for his sister's intrigues; Harry Richmond is the victim of his father's extravagance; Sandra Belloni is driven mad by the half-greedy, half-foolish shufflings of Wilfrid Pole. Earth, however, is not vindictive! Teacher before all, like Ceres of old, she makes of individual

misfortunes profitable examples to mankind as a whole. A word to the wise is sufficient! So much the worse for the heedless and the deaf! Earth, instead of bewailing their frailties, devotes herself to the fashioning of sound men.

Thus, like inexorable deities, the laws by which we are governed, demand obedience and respect. How useless, and even blasphemous, are the prayers in which we express our egotistic desires! . . . It is effrontery to claim privileges. Earth, being just, ignores favouritism. Neither undue benefits nor exemptions are granted. But a sincere believer is contented with passionately adoring Nature! The outpourings of his soul, his pure delights give him strength to look the future in the face, and with greater confidence to advance along the road of progress. . . .

Prayer, provided it be strictly contemplative and disinterested, has no stronger champion than Meredith, for no one, in a long and toilsome career, has better proved its virtue:

> If courage should falter, 'tis wholesome to kneel.
> Remember that well, for the secret with some,
> Who pray for no gift, but have cleansing in prayer,
> And free from impurities tower-like stand.[1]

Again, Shrapnel, the freethinker, to his young disciple Beauchamp:

Prayer for an object is the cajolery of an idol; the resource of superstition. . . . It is the recognition of

[1] *The Empty Purse.*

laws; it makes us repose on the unknown with confidence, makes us flexible to change, makes us ready for revolution—for life, then! . . . To pray is to escape from routine; from pride, our volcano-peak that sinks us in a crater; and from fear which plucks the feathers from the wings of the soul and sits it naked and shivering in a vault.[1]

In this special acceptation of the meaning, Meredith's work is one long prayer, an act of faith whose manifestations can be accomplished anywhere. . . . Even in the heart of a populous city, in suburbs begrimed by factories, upon the quays where the sirens of steamers scream, blood, brain, and spirit are in harmony with Nature. But chiefly, in scenes of beauty, emotion and thankfulness will take the scales from off our eyes. Upon the cold and starry winter nights, when the stars proclaim their mystic hymns, "the heavens become our home more than the nest whereto apace we strive."[2] It is then that prayer fills our souls with a great blessedness.

This union with Nature is not idle fancy. How many poets, how many thinkers are conscious of an indefinable kinship with human beings, with things, with all the living cells scattered throughout the universe! . . . It is proof that Earth does not remain insensible to man's cry. Earth understands and hearkens to him. . . . Certainly the life of

[1] *Beauchamp's Career.*
[2] See the poem entitled *Winter Heavens.*

Nature is not to be compared absolutely with ours. But, between the two, sympathy is manifested in a common origin and analogous laws. In the pith and in the blood courses the same vitality. At unchangeable periods, the same affections, the same phenomena of birth and death confirm our parentage. There is, then, nothing astonishing if Meredith is wedded to Nature ; or if we find in our poet a note like that of St. Francis of Assisi. The voice of the Englishman is rougher ; he comes from the North ; but it sounds not less affectionate.

. . .

Like St. Francis, George Meredith would himself extol " his sister the Water," and " his brother the Sun," if he did not reserve his loftiest praises for the pastures, the tilled lands and the woods, where,

> Sweet as Eden is the air,
> And Eden-sweet the ray.
> No Paradise is lost for them
> Who foot by branching root and stem,
> And lightly with the woodland share
> The change of night and day.[1]

Symbols of joyous submission, the brushwood and the leaves, where gather many birds and countless insects, obey without complaint the decrees of the seasons. Emblems and parables abound therefore in those woods of Westermain [2] that Meredith transforms into an allegory. Might he not be

[1] Poem : *Woodland Peace.*
[2] Poem : *The Woods of Westermain.*

mistaken for Melampus himself when he speaks of their botanical life?

With love exceeding a simple love of the things
That glide in grasses and rubble of woody wreck;
Or change their perch on a beat of quivering wings
From branch to branch, only restful to pipe and peck;
Or, bristled, curl at a touch their snouts in a ball;
Or cast their web between bramble and thorny hook;
The good physician Melampus, loving them all,
Among them walked, as a scholar who reads a book.

For him the woods were a home and gave him the key
Of knowledge, thirst for their treasures in herbs and flowers.
The secrets held by the creatures nearer than we
To earth he sought, and the link of their life with ours:
And where alike we are, unlike where, and the veined
Division, veined parallel, of a blood that flows
In them, in us, from the source by man unattained
Save marks he well what the mystical woods disclose.

And this he deemed might be boon of love to a breast
Embracing tenderly each little motive shape,
The prone, the flitting, who seek their food whither best
Their wits direct, whither best from their foes escape:
For closer drawn to our mother's natural milk,
As babes they learn where her motherly help is great:
They know the juice for the honey, juice for the silk,
And need they medical antidotes find them straight.[1]

But a monster infests these woodland shades—both the moonlit glades where Sandra Belloni sings, and the mysterious woods of Westermain; also those so dearly loved by the dreamer Melampus, and the large and lordly domain where struts Sir Willoughby Patterne.

The monster is the "ego," the execrable "ego"

[1] Poem: *Melampus.*

of the thankless and presumptuous egoist. It is this "ego" which renders us insensible to sweetest strains and to most pathetic melodies. This rampant being with its coarse and passionate uproar so silences all celestial music that we pass by the claims of Nature and are obsessed by material cares. Many imagine that it is sufficient to allow themselves to be lulled by the murmurs of the forest. Not at all! It is still necessary for Siegfried to exterminate the dragon Fafner. Thus only do we divine a new language, a language marvellously caressing and musical, a language lisped in a former existence, in the far-off fairy days of this world: the language of birds and beasts.

Melampus, with ear attuned to Nature's sound, drew from nightingales and rivers their secrets. More than that! He invoked the god of the lyre himself, the master of the harmonies, Apollo. And the latter, lighting up the dark places of earth with such a light that our eyes could not withstand, lavished his teaching and counsels upon Melampus. He showed him wisdom inaccessibly enthroned looking down upon our frailties.

Sweet, sweet: 'twas glory of vision, honey, the breeze
In heat, the run of the river on root and stone,
All senses joined, as the sister Pierides
Are one, uplifting their chorus the Nine, his own.
In stately order, evolved of sound into sight,
From sight to sound intershifting, the man descried
The growths of earth, his adored, like day out of night,
Ascend in song, seeing nature and song allied.

Melampus dwelt among men: physician and sage,
He served them, loving them, healing them; sick or maimed
Or them that, frenzied in some delirious rage,
Outran the measure, his juice of the woods reclaimed.
He played on men, as his master, Phœbus, on strings
Melodious: as the God did he drive and check,
Through love exceeding a simple love of the things
That glide in grasses and rubble of woody wreck.

. . .

It is with equal piety that the wise Melampus and the poet George Meredith have studied Earth. In truth, these verses express only an ideal. But who can differentiate between a perfect illusion and true reality? Besides, have we the right to disdain as a mirage an ideal that Meredith has proved, by one example, almost magnificent? . . . On the contrary, we must endeavour to understand it with sensitive intelligence, if we desire that Meredith's work should interest us, not as a city of former days, rich in picturesque ruins, but as a living organism.

Of all poets Meredith is most enamoured of earth. Provided that we remember this, we shall yield to him not only our admiration, but our sympathy for his singular gifts. We shall not then criticise that bewildering faculty of analysis which is applied to the soul of meadow-lands, or of glades, as well as to human beings. We shall not then say that this tendency to perceive the infinitely small, and to describe it, is poet's witchcraft. But we shall admit

that fondness can confer upon poets the power of clairvoyance.

The magic, the wizardry, or if we prefer it better the genius of Meredith consists in considering Earth, or all things of Earth, not from without but from within. Therein lies his originality. Many others before him have spoken worthily of Nature, above all in England, whose poets are eloquent interpreters of Nature. But he loves not Nature for the sake of idyll or eclogue. He is neither a latter-day "lakist," nor a misanthrope like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who flouts society by preaching a return to the savage state. Such a reaction would irritate a thinker who appreciates the successive and progressive contributions of civilisation. Still less would he dream of substituting Nature for God, of humiliating Christianity by extolling Paganism. A George Meredith who sends us back to Earth, does not make a fetish of our planet, neither does he endow it with mystic personality: to remind us of our origin, to focus our egoism, then to demolish it utterly,—this was his object.

Without doubt didactic literature has been much decried. But why has poetry been scared away from supporting schools of thought, if it is the notion of Earth which inspires their rigorous codes? Why should we think of poets as providers of mere dainties? A Muse which ennobles our daily toils by placing them upon the pedestal of the supreme

laws of the cosmos, can watch over our duties without repugnance. In the dawn of the twentieth century, the Muse became again positive, studious, learned, careful and instructive, as the first gnomic poets, even as the ancient instructors of humanity ; as a Hesiod or a Théognis. Meredith, without wile or bashfulness, defines the most important of his abstract poems, *The Empty Purse*, a sermon ! . . .

. . .

He preaches, and with all the more fervour, because he imagines that he is a voice crying in the wilderness. And we, his hearers, should not make a point of ascertaining whether the prophet is a pessimist or an optimist ; nothing would be more unreasonable. Let us leave these points of dispute to babblers who so well determine either the good or irremediably bad relationship of mankind with the outside world. We others, if we look upon the face of Earth as the reality of realities, if, far beyond all bargaining, we revere her as a mother,—little will it signify whether she has brought advantage or not to one in particular of her creatures ! . . . Our planet renders its account to the universe, and not such transient phantoms as human beings. . . .

At the same time George Meredith does not exalt the idealist more than the materialist. In the traditional sense of the word he is not a " believer." No one is less troubled about dogma ; and touching articles of faith, the silence that he observes in his

writings does not seem to have weighed upon him. In conversation he was more expansive, and those who have had the honour of being intimate with him, know quite well that he did not incline more towards Catholicism than towards Protestantism. What an abyss, however, between Meredith and an atheist ! His generous and active spirit is horrified at the idea of negation. We cannot conceive of Meredith imitating the proud but hostile and defiant attitude of Alfred de Vigny. He would not write these verses with so bitter a melancholy :

> Le juste opposera le dédain à l'absence
> Et ne répondra plus que par un froid silence
> Au silence éternel de la divinité.

George Meredith believes in the presence of divinity, and, for him, this divinity is not silent : to its language he listens everywhere with delight ; its forms and its kindly face he perceives and adores in all places. The history of the world, the past, the present and the great future beyond attest and presage the fruitful work of Earth to this poet, contemporary of Darwin, and impregnated despite himself with evolutionary ideas. The metamorphoses of species, their developments, their progress are masterpieces constantly repeated with ever-watchful solicitude. Thus religion and science give of their most precious essences, and they blend with the atmosphere where dwell the thoughts of Meredith. This persuasive peacemaker turns us from

pseudo-ideas, and places us on guard against the artificial conflicts which are created by colourless metaphysical inquiries. This is the reason why in distinguishing from the materialists a thinker so sensitive to religious emotions, we will not abandon this devotee of experimental truths to ignorant and reactionary idealists.

This also will readily be conceded: a spirit to whom certain questions do not even present themselves,—although they occupy the minds of most philosophers,—such a spirit leans towards optimism, if not by reflection, at least by disposition. In fact, Meredith's power lies in this: he tenderly reverences the decisions of Earth. In default of religious belief, he has entire confidence in her. "Earth," says he, "can only desire her own welfare. Besides, we are an integral part of Earth. Therefore she wishes us well. . . ."

But why does this conviction, more than any other, give to Meredith an unalterable serenity? It is because most religions distinguish their followers from others in matters of divinity; and then upon this radical differentiation rituals are based. But here the faithful hold direct communication with their God; here there is a trust, boundless, spontaneous, direct and infallible, like the trust of a newly-born child in its mother: a trust which does not demand guarantees. Meredith pours ridicule upon unbelievers who declare themselves ready

to believe, provided they are furnished with proofs.[1]

Proofs! where can they be found? . . . Supposing they exist, would they be intelligible? Meredith, who was educated in Germany, does not hesitate to criticise pure reason. In the case where proofs, whatever they may be, escaped our grasp, faith would appertain to the intuitions of nature rather than to the uncertain strugglings of the mind.

We must not lay the charge of failure at the doors of science! . . . Science has never promised to satisfy all our needs. And how could it do so? . . . Abstract by origin and formation, it satisfies only the intelligence. But man is not alone a creature of mind. According to Meredith he is composed of three elements: body, mind and soul.[2] Whilst our mind is troubled in the presence of Earth, our bodies and souls warn us that she is the embodiment of love and wisdom. The body and the soul by their secret suggestions, all the more commanding because secret, govern the hidden depths of our personality. This suffices. Often for our welfare we are irresistibly led back to Earth.

This facing about does not in any way subordinate

[1] For instance, in the poem *Earth and Man*.

[2] It is not out of place to observe that Meredith indifferently uses the words "blood," "flesh," "the senses" to designate the body; and for the intelligence he uses "mind," "reason," "understanding."

reason to our other faculties. When reason has some advantage to offer us, neither the soul nor the body must cast it back ; still less will they desire an end that reason repudiates. There need be no mysticism in this. Neither the body nor the soul fosters a gift of second sight which is lacking in intelligence. Because the transports of the body, and the soul's aspirations so strongly aid the efforts of the mind, it does not follow that their intervention has a supernatural and half-providential tendency. Meredith's teaching is assuredly exhortation to hope, but still more to be courageous and resigned. To accept the world as it is ; to conform to its laws without idle comment ; this union of body and mind with spirit, then of human spirit with cosmic spirit, constitutes an act of supreme faith. On the one hand, the mind, to use Meredith's bold expression, " stands tiptoe," in an endeavour to vie with the soul. On the other, the soul surpasses itself in order to be raised to the level of the soul of Earth. Thus is disproved the pretended antagonism between reason and faith.

Not being a founder of systems of philosophy, Meredith makes no point of formulating his teaching. He confines himself to expressing it in song. Besides the fact that his processes do not bring him into line with sociologists, moralists or metaphysicians, his very tendencies are hostile to them. Their inquiries weary him. He becomes impatient with

their reasoning. He despises their endless and idle questionings, "that sow not nor spin." [1]

> They see not above or below ;
> Farthest are they from my soul,
> Earth whispers : they scarce have the thirst,
> Except to unriddle a rune ;
> And I spin none ; only show,
> Would humanity soar from its worst,
> Winged above darkness and dole,
> How flesh into spirit must grow.[2]

Man's heritage here below would be a goodly one, if he did not lose his chance through vanity. Our foolish and arrogant pride blinds us from the cradle to the tomb. It prevents us from looking out not only upon life but upon death. It induces us to dramatise unduly our sorrows. "What are they doing in Sirius?" asked Ernest Renan sarcastically.

George Meredith, without rising as high as Sirius, places himself a little above Earth ; and at once he realises that individuals count for less than generations, and generations for much less than mankind. "Whither are we going?" becomes a question more vain than this : "From whence do we come?" There is nothing permanent but the fruit of labour. There is nothing stable but what is well done. Our death is a phenomenon like to the falling of the leaves ; it does not necessarily imply a resurrection.

[1] *A Faith on Trial.* [2] *Ibid.*

And why rebel against death, why fear it, if we love Earth as we should do?

> Death, shall I shrink from loving thee?
> Into the breast that gives the rose
> Shall I with shuddering fall?[1]

Besides, Earth voluntarily yields up her secret to those who sincerely love her. And they at least know that for one generation gathered to its rest a thousand others are to appear. They know that the old must give place to the young, because decay is inevitable in a universe which is not perfect. They know that our work defies this universal decay, and that the gratitude of men guarantees us immortality! It is immaterial whether, in order to flatter our "amour-propre," we officially commemorate the illustrious dead, as in the Positivist religion of Auguste Comte; it is immaterial whether we are well spoken of ourselves! The dead of least renown live again in their children. The chain of mankind is immense and unbroken. All of us by our deeds, right through the ages, remain the invisible auxiliaries of our visible and distant descendants.

This restricted, and one might almost say altruistic idea of immortality belonged at first to Auguste Comte. It is from him that Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer borrowed it. Then George Meredith took the idea, illuminating and expanding it with the flame of his genius. Immortality, as he conceives

[1] *Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn.*

it, no longer serves as a platonic reward to a being dismayed by the imminence of his annihilation. It is more valuable than a reward, more valuable than any free passage. It adds to our belief an organic corollary; it entirely permeates the mind and the soul in order to make them pure, and to drive out the only egotistic regret which could still dwell in them. It seems to augment the charm of existence only to mitigate the terrors of death. . . .

. . .

We must not neglect Our Lady of the Earth! She affirms our magnanimous intentions: she enlarges our visual horizon; she makes still more sensitive certain particularly delicate modes of thought.—A tempest bows a forest in Rhineland, and Richard Feverel sees more clearly into his own nature.[1] At Wilming Weir, on a moonlit night, Sandra Belloni revels in her own happiness with a perfect serenity.[2] It is while traversing his garden towards sunset that Doctor Shrapnel feeds the fire of his angry mood.[3] During the glorious dawn which tinges Venice with purple, a tremor of love agitates Nevil Beauchamp and Renée.[4] Matey Weyburn and Aminta link their souls together upon a fresh morning when swimming out together into the open sea.[5] Nothing brings Carinthia to her brother Chillon so much as

[1] *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.*
[2] *Sandra Belloni.*
[3] *Beauchamp's Career.*
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Lord Ormont and his Aminta.*

their mountain walk in the Tyrolese Alps, after they had left their father's home. . . .[1]

And if the sight of these magnificent scenes, if contact with Earth only predisposes us to a pitch of acute sensibility; if our minds demand more explicit commands before calling up reserves of energy;—then, we must consult the Spirit of Comedy, since Earth has given it to us as our guardian angel.

THE CONCEPTION OF THE SPIRIT OF COMEDY

Do you wish to have an almost precise idea of this angel? Conceive then an observer, situated in such a position as Jupiter or Uranus, who would unceasingly judge our thoughts and our actions with reference to the world in which we live. Here we have a faithful representation of the Comic Spirit.

In effect, this angel is above all a judge. It does not limit itself with registering the vicissitudes of certain relations between humanity and Earth. It compares that variable relationship with the constant relationship which ought to unite the human race to Earth. It compares, calculates, appreciates and evaluates. And, in doing this, it enunciates the measure according to which each individual should conform to his duty towards the human race.

And now, to define this duty. . . . Men, in very

[1] *The Amazing Marriage.*

early days, had to subordinate individual to general advantage. And this was the first victory of their moral conscience. But that is insufficient. We have acquired since that period, thanks to the progress of science, more precise ideas upon the destiny of our planet; the intellectual conscience has been enriched and fortified. It is incumbent upon us henceforth to adapt our conduct to these new principles, so that the moral conscience coincides entirely with the intellectual conscience. This compact, this harmony of the two consciences is indispensable, if we desire that individuals should work together for the welfare of nations, and nations for the good of humanity.

Herein the Comic Spirit aids us. Even as humanity dominates individuals and nations by morality and by laws, so Earth imposes upon humanity, as a guardian, the control of the Spirit of Comedy.

. . .

This choice may be displeasing. Truly, we should not have believed the Comic Spirit to be of so great an influence. And its exaltation to a position so dignified disturbs us like a paradox. . . . But what really offends us is to have the Comic Spirit for tutor; precisely the only "Spirit" that we cannot take seriously. . . . It is repugnant to us to submit our intelligence to a power of inferior order.

The origin of this repugnance is that we confound the Comic Spirit with its derivatives: satire, humour

and irony. . . . There could be no greater mistake ! . . . The proper function of the Spirit of Comedy is not to excite laughter. Having nothing of the buffoon in its nature, it is no more jocular than is common sense. Sometimes only, if it compares our conduct with that which should take place in a society better adapted to its functions, it notices the deviation. . . . And then, constrained to administer punishment immediately, in order to safeguard the indefeasible rights of Earth, the Comic Spirit makes use of its weapon : it smiles. . . .

. . .

And the artist smiles also when he notices this deviation. . . .

His work, inspired by the Comic Spirit, holds more or less to comedy. But this does not aim solely at amusing us : *Le Mariage de Figaro* may be a more amusing play than *Le Misanthrope,* but nevertheless Beaumarchais is vastly inferior to Molière. The Spirit of Comedy, so far as concerns only its profound tendencies, enters more rarely into vaudeville than into tragedy. George Meredith expressly declares so. " The last scenes of a comedy can be written with blood "—as the *Tragic Comedians*—" still there are few characters so large and complex of mould as to merit the simultaneous aid of both Muses." But, on the contrary, " whoever laughs at all things misunderstands the comic in comedy." To study the Comic Spirit is not to

study the smile, but much more, a special smile: the smile fine, subtle, grave, mysterious, which is prolonged into a thought; the peculiar smile of Leonardo da Vinci. . . .

A young author must resolutely pursue comedy if he wishes to become an apostle of Earth. The more so that comedy, being not confined exclusively to the theatre, yields itself with considerable facility to the narrative form. Is not Meredith's *Egoist* a model of "comedy in narrative"? But, then, all Meredith's novels are, more or less, comedies in narrative form. The author did not run the risk of taking a false step, having determined upon elucidating, before writing, the conditions of the existence of comedy. His researches were delivered in the brilliant lecture of the 1st of February, 1877, which was printed in book form twenty years later, under the title *Essay on Comedy*.

"A society of cultivated men and women is required, wherein ideas are current and the perceptions quick, that he may be supplied with matter and an audience. The semi-barbarism of merely giddy communities, and feverish emotional periods, repel him; and also a state of marked social inequality of the sexes; nor can he whose business is to address the mind be understood where there is not a moderate degree of intellectual activity." [1]

Here we find the reason why, despite his demo-

[1] *Essay on Comedy*, p. 8 of the edition by Constable and Co.

cratic sympathies, Meredith draws his numerous romantic characters from the "bourgeoisie" and even from the aristocracy. It is a matter of small importance if these characters have not an intelligence of the first order. A recognised standard of education, society manners, and above all a delicate sensibility, these are the essentials. And this condition applies not less to the actors than to the spectators, for the true understanding of the comic is the privilege of an "élite." We may conclude that it is necessary to have assimilated without too much embarrassment the customs and ideals of a very select society in order to perceive readily certain shades.

So perfect a union between theatre and stage has been maintained but once since Aristophanes: in France, under Louis XIV, Molière gave his message to a public perfectly ready to understand him. But he had good fortune on his side. Authors and the public since then seek vainly to become reunited. The conception of the Comic Spirit is changed whilst this weary game of hide-and-seek lasts, and we ask ourselves what will become of the infallible and beneficent touchstone, which formerly tested the characters upon the stage. . . .

Evidently Meredith's thesis presents this weak point:[1] the Comic Spirit is hardly adequate for the

[1] Cf. the criticism of M. Basil de Selincourt in Mrs. Sturge Henderson's book, p. 220.

task it undertakes. According to Meredith, no less subtleness is required to understand pleasantry than to create it. . . . But then will the ignorant, the boorish, the foolish, all such stupid folk who bring down upon themselves the anger of the Comic Muse, will they go quite unpunished? Has Meredith overrated the power of intelligence? Perhaps. . . . But what does it matter! If we are unable to make proper use of our brains, the best stimulant still would be to study Meredith! . . .

. . .

Any other writer with similar gifts would have hesitated between philosophy and romance. But George Meredith recognised very quickly that the latter offered the most expressive manifestation for the Comic Spirit. Pure psychology has a dignity of its own; but it is confined to dealing with probabilities. The novelist, on the contrary, is bound by honour to reveal the fundamentals in man's nature. He casts his abstract ideas into the domain of the imagination in order to retain them more firmly. Fearing to lose himself in the labyrinths of the human soul, he does not scrutinise it with a magnifying-glass, with a watch-maker's eye; but he takes a bird's-eye view, as one surveys the valley from an Alpine summit.[1]

If you agree with Mr. Trevelyan that the historian, as well as the novelist, can trace our actions to their

[1] See *The Egoist*, p. 3.

extreme consequences, the novel will all the same offer the advantage of differentiating between apparent and real motive power. If in the interest of his dual campaign, theoretical and practical, George Meredith combines philosophical poetry and narrative prose, it is because as a novelist he devours the oyster of which the historian and philosopher only obtain the shell. George Meredith, in publishing his teaching of Earth, declares war against egoism; after which, in his novels, he assures victories to the Comic Spirit.

. . .

Egoism, this is the arch-enemy! But let us beware! Egoism is multiform. . . . Egoism, the marrow of the primitive brute, has no particular shape, but represents a principle both general and organic. We pretend to strip our old enemy; but in reality we dress him up in the prevailing fashion. Under his new disguise he is represented as the product of a complex civilisation. And we treat a tendency, inborn and deeply-rooted, as a senile infirmity.

Nevertheless, the Comic Spirit does not allow itself to be duped. It spares the egoist; the frank egoist, who is a veritable dragoon, a monster, antediluvian, fantastic, unparalleled, prodigious. But it cannot pardon that insipid and vapid sentimentalism so hypocritically virtuous; a debased form of egoism, and all the more pernicious in that it is quite deliberate. . . .

Egoism formerly only corrupted the mind; the sentimentalism of to-day poisons the conscience. Our sentimentalists vainly pretend to blink as do short-sighted persons: they see very clearly into their own natures.[1] A sentimentalist covets greatly the glory which arises from renunciation. But what does he do? Ingenious in procuring for himself without any effort the most flatulent illusions, he shows himself brave, chivalrous, magnanimous, and heroic at the expense of more feeble beings. Nero, for example, played the young sentimentalist with great talent. . . . Is an objection raised to such a sanguinary example? It is not by any means the most barbarous! . . . Our so-called humanitarian society can be charged with greater ferocity. In order to convince it that it is so, the Comic Spirit has but to open that enormous catalogue of egoism in which the doings of society are registered. This Comic Spirit constrains us to run through the catalogue, then to compile from it a manual. These abridgments constitute afterwards comedies in narrative. . . . How many injustices against love are thus denounced; injustices against women, against the poor, against all humble and disinherited persons! . . . Let us try to indicate them.

. . .

At the outset, what is the outstanding crime of the sentimentalist? . . . To disunite unscrupu-

[1] For example, Wilfrid Pole in *Sandra Belloni* or Lord Fleetwood in *The Amazing Marriage*.

lously that which Earth had united; to scoff at that which our flesh, our intelligence, our soul form into a triple and inviolate whole; to detach one of these three elements, then, half idly, half calculatingly, to use it to the detriment of the others; to profess at the same time, in order to find excuse for its caprice, that our body and our soul are separated by an abyss—such follies as these are but sport for the modern sentimentalist. By these methods he runs into two contrary heresies: asceticism and sensualism.

Vainly does the Comic Spirit protest that man is neither angel nor beast, and that neither the soul nor the body can incur contempt, since the both are directly sprung from Earth. In vain does the Comic Spirit extol temperance as the *via media* between two excesses equally absurd. In vain! . . . The feeble voice does not make itself heard.

Nothing seems more praiseworthy than to separate our soul from the flesh. The Middle Ages, acting upon the teaching of theologians, faithfully modelled the civil community upon the lines of monasticism. An unfortunate attempt!

> For Nature will force her way, and if you try to stifle her by drowning, she comes up, not the fairest part of her uppermost. . . .[1]

Such are the bitter draughts of sanctity.

As she grows in the flesh when discreetly tended, Nature is unimpeachable, flower-like, yet not too

[1] *Diana of the Crossways*, Chapter I.

decoratively a flower; you must have her with the stem, the thorns, the roots, and the fat bedding of roses. . . .[1]

Above all, the Comic Spirit strives to discipline the senses. But is to discipline to extirpate? . . . Sir Austin Feverel hastens the bankruptcy of his famous pedagogic system, through having brutally torn apart the soul and body of his son. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* proves asceticism a total failure.

On the other hand, far from flattering sensualism, the Comic Spirit denounces it. Whether it contemplates poor Dahlia Fleming[2] seduced and abandoned by Edward Blancove; whenever it touches lightly upon a similar subject in a youthful poem, entitled *London by Lamplight*,[3] Meredith is indignant that the body is exploited at the expense of the intelligence and the soul. Did he not, a week before his death, reproach Goethe for not having renounced pleasure in his old age? Meredith cried: "He, to be making love to young girls! I hate an old man in whom passion is dead and who yet desires to crush a young flower on his breast; I loathe it because Nature loathes it."[4] Little does it matter whether Goethe is disappointed, whether Edward Blancove is publicly accused, or whether Sir Austin Feverel weeps over the dead body of innocent Lucy Desborough! The injury is never-

[1] *Diana of the Crossways*, Chapter I. [2] *Rhoda Fleming*.
[3] *Poems* (1851). [4] In a private conversation.

theless done. Outraged Earth demands an atonement. . . .

A little true psychology would at once confute ascetics and sensualists, at the same time attesting to the solidarity of our constitutive principles.

It is true that man is an automaton. But we have no right to disorganise him. The senses lead to the brain, since all motive power emanates from the centre of motion. The soul in its turn presupposes the reciprocal reaction of mind and flesh, of which it is but the symbol. Never does the soul encroach upon the body or upon the understanding. Beautiful flower of evolution, of later birth than the others, it holds to the soil by roots that resist. How many disputes would be amicably settled, how many enigmas solved, if we would foster a more sincere alliance between the three domains of our being: body, mind and soul! . . .

And what solace to have to choose no more between abstinence and licence, between Artemis and Aphrodite! . . .[1] Each of them is goddess. And each claims exclusive adoration. . . . Therefore let us give homage to each of the two rivals. And then in the presence of that inmost tribunal, the conscience, let us continue to love simultaneously through the body and the mind, that is to say, through the soul. Let us not give way to excessive

[1] Cf. the philosophical tetralogy in the collection of 1901: *The Vital Choice, With the Huntress, With the Persuader, The Test of Manhood.*

muscular development, for fear that Earth may be overrun by an unwieldy and ignorant crowd of sportsmen. To sacrifice all to the mind is to multiply those abortions which we name " intellectuals." To shut the soul up in " splendid isolation " is to dedicate it to the extravagances of the mystics. An ascetic subjugates his body ; the sensualist scoffs at spiritual transports ; and there are tyrants so jealous of their prerogatives that they detest the fraternal sympathy of intelligent minds, and dread the emancipation of women as one dreads a hideous nightmare.

. . .

Mr. Warwick, Sir Willoughby Patterne, Lord Ormont and Lord Fleetwood, these male types of Meredith's refuse intellectual independence to Diana, Clara Middleton, Aminta and Carinthia. None of them imagines that a vehement passion can establish absolute equality between two sexes. Their despotism blinds them. " Men may have surrounded Seraglio Point : they have not yet doubled Cape Turk."[1]

Hence we have in so many wedded lives, those disillusions, those tragedies which are analysed in the fifty sonnets of *Modern Love*. A man and a woman equally generous, but of unequal intelligence, watch their love for each other slowly passing away. Its twilight brings poignant regret. By superhuman

[1] *Diana of the Crossways*, Chapter I.

efforts which are infinitely pathetic they seek to re-establish their love. All in vain! Despite the charm of first caresses, despite some chance reconciliations, "a gulf of silence separates them." Even when they speak to one another, their speech is not the same. Both endure their martyrdom with dignity. But the man, with a growing sense of his right of lordship, stoically swallows his grief, while the woman, heart-broken, and convinced that her husband desires only his freedom, ends by putting herself to death. In reality, it would have ended well if she had possessed more brain-power. Alas! "the sense of women is with their senses all mixed in." [1]

It is thus that the widower, in a paroxysm of anguish, sends up to God that heart-rending prayer: "More brain, O Lord, more brain!"

More brain? . . . But why are women not more enlightened? Because their inexperience, their ingenuousness, their simplicity must needs appeal to us as a result of their virtue. Men choose wives either unworthy or unsuitable. Rather than modify their standard, rather than oppose an antiquated prejudice, superstitious, tyrannical and barbarous, they choose companions incapable of understanding them. Alceste, fleeing from Célimène, will perhaps go to beg the hand of an Agnes.

The Comic Spirit smiles, too furtively for women to perceive. Instead of invoking it they descend

[1] *Modern Love*, XLVIII.

to the use of vague sentimental phraseology. They also confound ignorance with innocence. Too much liberty overwhelms them. They detest naked truth. They barely approve of *The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady*. That young woman who too frankly accuses herself of an excusable, a moving fault—how little is she made to please them ! . . .

Heroes and heroines are not always pleasant society ; and we feel much more drawn to the " fair ladies in revolt," who carry on a discussion with two men in the fresh air, the ladies the while leaning against the trunk of a swaying birch.[1] Let us not pass near to them without staying a moment. . . .

One of their questioners pleads on behalf of man ; the other keeps silence.

The most eloquent of the rebels thus speaks :

> Fair sirs, we give you welcome, yield you place,
> And you shall choose among us which you will,
> Without the idle pastime of the chase,
> If to this treaty you can well agree :
> To wed our cause, and its high task fulfil.
> He who's for us, for him are we !

But the champion of the male sex declines this captious offer.

He replies :

> So push you out of harbour in small craft,
> With little seamanship ; and comes a gale,
> The world will laugh, the world has often laughed,
> Lady, to see how bold when skies are blue,
> When black winds churn the deeps how panic-pale,
> How swift to the old nest fly you !

[1] *A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt.*

The ladies reply :

What thinks your friend, kind sir ? We have escaped
But partly that old half-tamed wild beast's paw
Whereunder woman, the weak thing, was shaped :
Men too have known the cramping enemy
In grim brute force, whom force of brain shall awe :
Him our deliverer, await we !

And then he retorts :

But say, what seek you, madam ? 'Tis enough
That you should have dominion o'er the springs
Domestic and man's heart : those ways, how rough,
How vile, outside the stately avenue
Where you walk sheltered by your angel's wings,
Are happily unknown to you.

To which she replies :

We hear women's shrieks on them. We like your phrase
Dominion domestic ! And that roar,
" What seek you ? " is of tyrants in all days.
Sir, get you something of our purity,
And we will of your strength : we ask no more.
That is the sum of what seek we.

And as coquetry never loses its charm, these ladies enforce their arguments by many captivating glances. Amidst the warring of words they abruptly cease and say : " And, sir, what thinks your friend ? " . . . The latter, very quickly succumbs, and ends by giving them his reason. Upon this, the poet indignantly dilates upon his discomfiture.

And he apostrophises Beauty, which he considers woman's weapon, her fortress, and her veritable empire :

Have women nursed some dream since Helen sailed
Over the sea of blood the blushing star,
That beauty, whom frail man as Goddess hailed,
When not possessing her (for such is he !),
Might in a wondering season seen afar,
Be tamed to say not " I," but " we " ?

But women are the slaves of their egoism. Alas ! . . . In fact, according to the Comic Spirit, a " League for the Protection of Women on account of their Beauty " would serve the fair sex much better than the riotous demonstrations of suffragettes. Yet, far from refusing them civic rights of magistracy, Meredith applauds their recent successes in various countries of Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon race. He takes pity upon the young French girl, condemned from her maidenhood to a banal *mariage de convenance.* Further, he goes so far as to state that a man who resembles a woman without becoming effeminate is the ornament of his sex."[1] The poet highly esteems women's qualities ; and no one will be astonished if he is reminded of Diana Warwick,[2] Lady Camper,[3] Chloe,[4] Jenny Denham,[5] or even of Clotilde von Rüdiger[6] whom Meredith somewhat despises. As to his famous aphorism, so often cited, yet so badly interpreted : " I expect that Woman will be the last thing civilised by Man,"[7] it is a two-edged piece of pleasantry. Man has really not

[1] *The Tragic Comedians.* [2] *Diana of the Crossways.*
[3] *The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper.*
[4] *The Tale of Chloe.* [5] *Beauchamp's Career.*
[6] *The Tragic Comedians.* [7] *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.*

the qualities by which he can "civilise" woman. The latter, intellectually his equal, is superior to him by reason of her divinations, her intuitions and her extraordinary inspirations. An improvisatrice of the first order, somewhat of an enchantress, Circe or Armida, according to the times, she possesses the divining rod. Each woman, like Jeanne d'Arc, has voices which give her counsel. . . .

What a pity that with so much intelligence, none of them have consistency of achievement ! . . . To this lack we attribute Diana Warwick's and Clotilde von Rüdiger's disasters. Both of them, like Vittoria, are carried by their feelings far beyond the limits of their will. With others, such as Rhoda Fleming,[1] the will even encroaches upon the intelligence and becomes tyrannical. The biographies of these remarkable women abound in inconsistencies, in bewildering contradictions between their plans and their actions: they deliberately forge chains for themselves as soon as they are given liberty ; tender-hearted and loving, ready to make the noblest sacrifices, they unaccountably give way to most vain and foolish ideas. Then, when they have forgotten all, weary and bitterly disappointed, incapable of combating their egoism, they allow themselves to be entangled in a maze of conventions. . . .

. . .

[1] See especially the last pages of *Rhoda Fleming*.

"To pinion egoism and to put a check upon routine," the Comic Spirit puts forward this message for society as a whole. Certainly Christianity has already commanded us to love our neighbour. But what is this love? . . . The quintessence of the moral conscience. . . . Ah! but the soul has the power to go much farther! . . . Even as an introduction precedes the symphony, as a sketch is made preparatory to the picture, as dawn heralds the morning, the moral conscience demands a fuller development towards the intellectual conscience. It aspires to this metamorphosis, lays claim to it, struggles to obtain it, because an increase of intelligence calls forth over all the Earth an increase of happiness.

And whose is the fault if we are still far from the goal? If the intellectual conscience sleeps in the state of a chrysalis? . . . Why, to all those belong the fault who doubt the reality of such an event! False pride, the fear of touching upon questions so delicate, or in addition, idleness and hypocrisy paralyse them. They never attend to the sores and ulcers of mankind. They rather would gag the impertinent folk who reveal them! . . .

For example, is England concerned about the misery with which all are so intimate? No! . . . Instead of encouraging intellectual pursuits, instead of extolling the rivalry of knowledge, old England is as eager as a child for its games of football and

cricket. At an age when the turmoil of the senses transforms us into birds of prey, fortunes are placed in the hands of young men. An imprudence much more serious lies in the fact that the rich create the fashion for their parasites and even for their victims ; they go about always escorted by their imitators, and these eagerly ape the vices of their patrons.

This is the reason why Meredith vigorously denounces the system of primogeniture. His poetic sermon, *The Empty Purse*, severely reprimands a young man of quality who has wasted his inheritance in riotous living. The German professor, Dr. Julius von Karsteg, is not less severe against English legislative measures when he questions Harry Richmond upon his future prospects. What terrible accusations he fulminates against " Great Britain besotted by her material prosperity " !

" Yes, you work hard for money, you English. You work so hard that you have all but one aim, and that is fatness and ease ! "

Although the same invectives occur again in *One of our Conquerors*, and are to be found in the ironical words of Lord Ormont, George Meredith has never blasphemed his native land as did Heinrich Heine. No, the initial cause of his ill-humour lies in his having expected too much from his compatriots. He is too proud to be one of them. Their progress does not content him ; his nimble thought outpaces

them ; he ceaselessly complains that they do not follow him. Now he rails against the snobbishness of the aristocracy—and what vexation for a Celt passionately attached to his dearly-beloved Wales, to see her first conquerors, the Saxons, superstitiously venerating the phantom of Norman Feudalism ![1] Now, despite his pacific tendencies, he summons the Government to reorganise the army by introducing conscription. But why squander millions merely upon armaments ? War has become a science ; as such war demands more than physical bravery ; it demands high intelligence : therefore it is necessary to regenerate minds at once by a reform in education.

But the Anglo-Saxons must know this : the Comic Spirit denounces their egoism ! The greatness of a State is measured by its contribution to international progress. Still the poorest Greco-Latin races are richer in generosity than the English people : their emotions are more quickly aroused ; they are much more obedient in their filial duties towards Earth. It is not in vain that Spanish blood runs in the veins of Aminta : she brings her sullen lord and master[2] to terms. Italy, hardly three centuries after the Renaissance, is awakened anew by a series of magnificent outbreaks. Meredith observed these shocks while he followed, as correspondent to the *Morning Post*, the Austro-Italian

[1] See especially *Aneurin's Harp* and *One of our Conquerors*, Chapter XI.

[2] *Lord Ormont and his Aminta.*

campaign of 1866. His Italian romance *Vittoria* appraises these risings. . . . The charm of Italy! Italian Emilia, received by the Pole family, is the only sympathetic figure of the English romance *Sandra Belloni.* Similarly, the sun rising upon Venice illumines the obscure and troubled career of Captain Beauchamp after the manner in which Claude Lorrain presents his fairy creations.

But it is the country of France for which Meredith has so great an affection. And this affection is by no means an idle fancy! . . . If Meredith does not hide his predilection for France, it is because nowhere else has the Comic Spirit such dominion. In Meredith's novels the English gain nothing by being placed in contrast with the French. Madame d'Auffray,[1] Louise de Seilles,[2] these accessory characters stand out in unforgettable relief upon a British background. Diana Warwick [3] pales beside the ravishing Renée de Croisnel.[4] In truth, this loving friend of Nevil Beauchamp is symbolic of all the charm of France. She it is of whom Meredith spoke in his old age: "Was she not an adorable creature? I believe that I am still somewhat in love with her. . . ." And the Socialist Alvan[5] is not less in love with France and Paris. Perhaps with Meredith he shared that veneration for Molière, that

[1] *Beauchamp's Career.*
[2] *One of our Conquerors.*
[3] *Diana of the Crossways.*
[4] *Beauchamp's Career.*
[5] *The Tragic Comedians.*

fine and profound knowledge of French history which is revealed in the *Essay upon Comedy*. He would have praised and painted with such a passion the countryside of Normandy, which serves as a frontispiece to the poem, entitled *A Faith on Trial;* or still more those vibrating protestations, that chivalrous speech in favour of the Duchesse de Dino,[1] whose maternal feelings the Countess de Brownlowe calls into question. . . . But no homage to France is more precious than the four *Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History*. The most ardent Frenchman would not sing of his native land with more enthusiasm. . . . And why this idolatrous passion? . . . Because France, in Meredith's eyes, is not only "the Gallic Giantess," "Mother of Delicacy," "Mother of Heroes," "Mother of Honour," "Mother of Glory": she is above all "Mother of Reason," or rather we might say, eldest daughter of the Comic Spirit. . . .

And yet Meredith accused himself of not having done justice to France! . . . On the 19th of September, 1908, he sent word to the author of these pages:

> It is true that at all times my heart has beaten for France; and it is not less true that, even up to this day, I have not acknowledged by an adequate testimony the debt that mankind owes to her. My *Odes in Contribution to the Songs of French History* are an effort in

[1] Article upon the *Mémoires* of Countess de Brownlowe, *Fortnightly Review*, February, 1868.

this direction. If I were younger, I should do still better work. . . .

. . .

Thus, despite his love for the Welsh mountains, despite his attachment to the plains of Surrey and Hampshire, where the grass waves under the breezes from the south-west, Meredith does not confine his affections to his own island. Far beyond France and Italy he greets the civilised world. How can a modern people live in separation, when races more and more are becoming mingled and amalgamated? The great wall of China will end by crumbling away. . . . But this is not all. The Comic Spirit wishes still to demolish these two Bastilles of egoism: local prejudices and national chauvinism.

An individual must not withdraw himself from social struggles any more than a State should do where the conflict is international. These social questions have always fired Meredith's imagination. His favourite work, *Beauchamp's Career*, places before us a young politician making his debut: it is really a political romance. Besides the striking phenomenon of actual political history, is it not the revival of the working-classes? They also, coming last after the nobility and the *bourgeoisie*, throw off their torpor and demand their share in life's well-being. The nobility and the middle-classes have vainly endeavoured in their indignation

to thrust back the intruders, who energetically resisted them. We are menaced, hustled and taken by the throat, whilst artists and thinkers listen with dismay to the preparations for civil strife. . . . But blessed be the anguish that they suffer! It proves to us that at last an era of larger fraternity is being inaugurated, since even these obstinate and proud dreamers can no more dare to detach their own well-being from the well-being of society in general. . . . In our time, neither poets nor philosophers leave politics to the "Philistines," as was the custom with the romanticists.

. . .

This encouraging symptom is sufficient for Meredith. Judging the victory of the Comic Spirit over egotistic tendencies as infallible though perhaps not immediate, he inclines his head towards Earth: then, with eyes fixed upon his Mother, he patiently awaits the new era with no less foresight than patience.[1] . . . It is this foresight which reveals to us the vague possibilities divined from afar, dim as larvæ in the dark; but it is to the patience we owe the ripening of our projects for the future. The union of the one with the other maintains the balance of human reason. And man is taught that he is neither wholly angel nor beast, but "a cowering angel and an upright beast."[2]

[1] *Foresight and Patience* in the selection of poems entitled *A Reading of Life*, 1901.
[2] *Ibid.*

As the Comic Spirit is not a twin brother to resignation, it by no means imposes upon us a state of apathy : on the contrary, it gives ear to human beings ; then, if it does not find in them the harmony produced by the flow of the blood, by the reciprocal action and reaction of organisms, it abandons with disgust " these corpses a-cold for lack of heat, but without death's plea."[1]

For these inert creatures, the Comic Spirit can do nothing. Wrongly separated from the material order of things, they will be destroyed, body and soul, after death. Thus perish all who indulge in corrupt practices and who are the slaves of routine.

As for brave men who suffer and fight in order to ensure for their sons a more happy lot, a lot with more light and more independence—immortality is their reward.

Certainly these great-hearted men form still an *élite*. But the day upon which the soul and the mind will be less subject to the material order, the moral conscience will have become part of the intellectual conscience. And our planet will have entered into the full possession of its innumerable vital resources.

On this same day, the mission of the Comic Spirit will be ended. We shall be rightly freed from our guardian, because we shall not need to be reminded of the constant relation between mankind and Earth.

[1] *Foresight and Patience* in the selection of poems entitled *A Reading of Life*, 1901.

CONCLUSION

. . . . . .

HIS most fervent admirers must not complain of injustice if George Meredith has long been neglected, or if he is but little known. Some artists desire a prompt, universal, and lucrative renown ; to achieve this they have to beat the big drum and learn the tricks of tub-thumping. Others, with greater delicacy and pride, who aspire above all to satisfy their own sensibility, are intoxicated by pure sensuousness, and wait for fortune's favours with disdainful patience. George Meredith made his choice of attitude at a very early age, and the unity of his work, as well as the calm but stubborn tenacity with which he has always persevered along the same path, testifies that he never experienced either repentance or regret. If he had suffered too cruelly from his bitter isolation, he would perhaps have thought of turning back. But in each poem, each book, he ventured further forward, careless of exhausting the courage and fidelity of his little band of admirers. And later on, when at last the English

prided themselves upon possessing in him a great visionary, he appeared to take pleasure in flouting their admiration,—as if he knew that they did not follow him too closely,—as if, under the influence of a long isolation, he had been conquered by that reckless love for the desert, by that passion for the lonely forest which sometimes takes possession of the most daring explorers.

Let us not commiserate a man who asks not to be pitied! He has told us himself in an extremely beautiful sonnet, *Internal Harmony*, that he envied not the success of his contemporaries:

> Assured of worthiness we do not dread
> Competitors; we rather give them hail
> And greeting in the lists where we may fail:
> Must, if we bear an arm beyond the head!
> My betters are my masters: purely fed
> By their sustainment I likewise shall scale
> Some rocky steps between the mount and vale. . . .

With the quick and clear discrimination with which he regarded his age, Meredith understood that, despite the splendour of his imagination, his teaching and his art scared the public. It was impossible to make a fashion of his too subtle, his too complex art, whose innumerable facets dazzle feeble-sighted readers without enlightening them;—and the same with his teaching, so simple yet withal so austere, which contrasts strangely with the subtlety of his art and which refuses to attract us by vain promises. Besides, as Meredith grew older

he gained in wisdom what he lost in imagination, so that the didactic tendencies of his art and teaching became still more intensified. His reason waged a pitiless war against his fancy. In the last twenty years of his old age, George Meredith wrote nothing but sermons or satires. And the public—be it English, German, or French—cares very little for this method of expression, because a sustained seriousness disconcerts it no less than intermittent irony.

Herein lies the reason for the small number of translations. As to their insufficiency, that is almost inevitable, and it is right to grant the greatest indulgence to interpreters of Meredith. On account of the capricious method of his syntax, and the singular quality of his style, George Meredith ranks with those authors who can hardly be translated. When we add that his inequalities, his caprices render such an undertaking extremely hazardous, we shall not be surprised to know that he has rebuffed most translators, and even publishers. Only a very great writer could translate George Meredith worthily. Now, great writers are rare ; they do not always know foreign language, and do not always incline to write translations. It is a remarkable exception for an Edgar Allan Poe to meet with a Charles Baudelaire, or a Stéphane Mallarmé.

Moreover, if few men read Meredith, still fewer women read him. This is hard to believe. This

man, who was ever a chivalrous and enthusiastic champion of woman's cause; this man who displayed a kind of veneration for women's intelligence; this man, who desired an absolute equality between the two sexes,—has never been rewarded for his zeal. . . . A strange thing that women, who are the best agents of publicity, have not repaid him with gratitude! Without doubt their gratitude is governed by the difficulty that they experience in reading him. And these mordant works, so difficult to read, do not fail to puzzle them. Meredith's eccentricity is not clamorous, rude, and frenzied, like that of Nietzsche. It is serene, more discreet, and does not seek to astound the senses in order to convince the mind.

There are also certain readers who reproach Meredith with offering them, in alarming guise, commonplace truisms. Something rather paradoxical would have suited them better. If Meredith had only announced with sound of trumpets a new moral, a new religion, instead of remaining loyal to the Spirit of Earth and to the Comic Spirit, the dabblers in literature and philosophy would have assembled around his humble pastoral retreat and would have acclaimed him triumphantly. But the master's decision was irrevocable and high-minded; he knew that his works would give pleasure only to an *élite*.

Let us not wish for him a success, the favours of

which he has so nobly refused. Let us not credit him, after his death, with vulgar longings which he so much detested. But let us endeavour at any cost to enlarge that *élite* to which he speaks, and which will never be unfaithful to him. Time will be his most efficacious auxiliary. Did not Meredith labour ceaselessly for posterity? And what is posterity itself but the imperishable *élite* of generations yet to come? . . .

There is in all countries, and above all in France, a certain class, which, by reason of its character and culture, is predisposed to read Meredith; but many well-informed people do not realise this, because the poet-novelist is little known, and still less translated. To draw the attention of future disciples to this extraordinary man; to tell of the pleasure which contact with such a genius has for clear-sighted spirits; to encourage, in a certain measure, persons who rightly dare not undertake a translation of Meredith,—such is the purpose of this modest study. If our efforts could have corresponded with our desires, this work would be also a tribute to the memory of the great man whom we have had the honour of visiting at Flint Cottage, and who has there received and encouraged us with a kindness we cannot forget.

PRINTED BY
WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON, LTD.
PLYMOUTH

P-20-

Sarasate y Navarrete-

sä-rä-sä'tā ē nä-nä'-tā

Pablo Martin Melitón.

Born at Pamlona, Spain, mar. 10-1844-
a noted Spanish violinist-
was taken to Paris as a child and entered
the Conservatoire in 1856-
Began successful tours in 1859-
visited all parts Europe and many parts
with S. South America- & Jamaica,
composed a number of fantasias,
arrangements & Spanish airs & dances &c

P.20-

Joachim-yō'-ä. Orig. Josefh-

Born at Kolosca- near Pressburg Hungary-
1831- June 28.
celebrated German violinist & composer.
Had great success as a soloist & quartet player
1849 was made leader of the grand ducal band
at Weimar-
was conductor from 1853 to 1854 of music
at court of Hanover 1854-66 & head of music
school at Berlin 1868-
Received honorary degree of Mus. D. in 1877 from
Cambridge- a master of technique whose
style is regarded as model in England
& on the continent-